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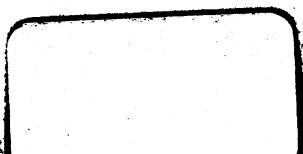
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LAUNCELOT WIDGE.

BY

CHARLES HOOTON, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "COLIN CLINK," "BILBERRY THURLAND," &C.

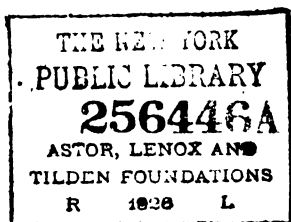
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LAUNCELOT WIDGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE VAULTS UNDER THE ADELPHI.

LATE one night in the month of October, 18—; so late that the hands of St. Martin's church, hard by, pointed close upon midnight, a woman, not indifferently clothed, nor otherwise of mean appearance, was seen hurrying along Charing Cross and the Strand, having apparently come in a direction somewhere west of the locality now mentioned. In her arms she bore a bundle, for such it seemed, but which, from the position wherein she supported it, as well as by the shape, evidently contained one of those little mites of humanity that nature consigns, after months of anxiety and pain, to the love and care of its parents through the travails of the world without.

The woman had just come from the house of a medical man who a short time before she quitted his door, had returned hastily in a coach from a mansion in ——— row, along the pavement before which was strewn a quantity of new trampled straw, so significantly indicative that within was sickness too deep to be endured only in silence, and pain that could not survive under aggravation.

Yes, within that house lay the pale mother of the child we have just seen so untimely and so unfitly carried through an October blast at an hour so late. She herself knew it not, for as yet she even knew not that she was herself alive.

But a month before this night, her husband, Sir Stephen Woodhouselee, had died—the Lady Lavinia was at once a widow and a mother. Grief between then and now had been busy in the poor work of marring female beauty, and wasting strength that better had been happily preserved for the time of a woman's deepest endurance. But Providence had willed it otherwise, and cast the two greatest troubles of nature, Death and Life, together, upon the devoted head of the lady of Woodhouselee.

Under these circumstances, our common nature seems to teach us that avarice, however relentless, would for once give way to humanity; and the heart of treachery itself be lost in the deep and double sorrows of the afflicted. But experience teaches us that sometimes the heart most hardens where most it ought to feel, and that helplessness and pain only stimulate, by the advantages they offer, that iron-handed avarice which else they would, in a generous bosom, wholly disarm.

In the same room with the poor widowed mother, we must draw the reader's particular attention to a lady clothed in the deepest mourning, covered to profusion with the outward signs and "mockery of woe" for the loss of her own brother, Sir Stephen; but who, in her heart, never wept when the vault was opened for his remains, since his removal out of the way had opened before her a free path to the attainment of a great object, which never could have been achieved had he lived even only one month longer, and once thrown his protection over the child that ought to have succeeded him as heir. That great object was the possession of his extensive and valuable property.

Mrs. Thoroton, the lady whom we have thus introduced, was the only surviving sister of Sir Stephen Woodhouselee, and, providing he should die childless, the sole heiress to all his estates.

Some months before, her heart had been filled with bitterness at the anticipation of a babe that should step before her, and in all probability for ever shut out herself and her husband from the remotest chance of ever enjoying the family estates. Hence, in conjunction with her husband, she had planned various clever stratagems in order, if possible, to divert the expected course of events, and to turn them into a channel more immediately and certainly advantageous to herself. All these, however, had failed, until, in the midst of her despair, the death of Sir Stephen, her brother, revived her with renewed and more certain hope. With

him in the way she could do nothing—out of it, she might do every thing. His widow was about to give birth to the heir upon whom all her fortunes or her misfortunes depended. Did he survive to be brought up by his mother, her prospects were for ever ruined. Could she succeed in clandestinely getting him out of the way, those fortunes were as assuredly made. The step, then, to be taken was no longer equivocal or doubtful.

Accordingly, the plan was cautiously and deliberately arranged, and after a brief negotiation, both medical man and nurse were induced to connive at the design she had formed, of taking away the infant at the period of its birth, and afterwards persuading her sister, its mother, that it had either been born dead, or had died and been carried away immediately afterwards.

This plan, then, had been successfully executed on the night when our tale commences, while complete success was promised to it from the fact that the poor sufferer herself was in a condition which rendered it utterly impossible she could be conscious of any thing respecting either herself or her posthumous son.

According to the arrangements which Mrs. Thoroton, her husband, the doctor, and the nurse had conjointly made, the boy was carried away shortly after his birth, and consigned to the care of that poor woman in whose arms we have already seen him; disregardless of the fact that to the sorrows of the widow and the mother, they were adding those almost more painful ones of her being informed, at that fearful time, that she was also a new young mother without a child.

Mrs. Thoroton herself undertook the difficult task of making this unavoidable explanation; and that she did so with becoming delicacy, tenderness, and sisterly sympathy, the following scene, which shortly afterwards took place between the two, will sufficiently testify.

"Where is my child?" asked the Lady Lavinia, as for the first time she recovered sense and speech, "bring it to me, sister, and I shall be happy."

"Soon, Linny, very soon," replied Mrs. Thoroton, "but you must not be disturbed just now; keep yourself calm and quiet, and then I hope it will all prove as we wish at last."

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" cried the mother, "what can be amiss? what ails it?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered Mrs. Thoroton, "we have all seen to it, so I trust you will rest contented. If you agitate yourself—"

"But is it like my husband, my dear, good husband?" demanded the lady; "if I could but see his face again in that blessed baby, I should soon recover, very soon. Bless both their dear hearts? I shall never get over his loss I know: and yet I ought, for the sake of this pretty sweet thing, which will die without me."

"There, there, good lady," interrupted the nurse, "do not talk, you must not talk now, indeed. Be calm, be calm."

"But let me see it! why not let me see it?" demanded the mother. "I must see it, and then I shall be quiet—I will do anything then—I will do just as you tell me—I will be firm, and bear it all!"

But as she promised firmness, the "sorrowful water," as Shakspeare terms it, came resolutely to her eyes, and she wept deeply in sad contradiction to the tongue that had spoken without knowing what nature could or could not bear.

Mrs. Thoroton again requested her to be pacified; comforted her with the cold comfort, that we all had our troubles; and exhorted her so far to fortify herself against every possible evil and mischance that *might* come upon her, as to be enabled to resist, with becoming strength and fortitude, such griefs as providence in its wisdom dealt out, at one time or another, to every individual, even the most favored, of the human race.

This speech seemed so much like a prelude, or introduction to bad news, that the Lady Lavinia started with convulsive energy on hearing it, and half deliriously demanded if her child were dead?

"The Lord,"—muttered her sister whiningly, and making a pretence to weep, "the Lord giveth, my dear sister, and the Lord taketh away."

"Ah!" shrieked the unhappy mother, "my child is gone—he is gone from me, and I have never seen him!" and so she shrieked again and fainted.

"Nurse!" observed Mrs. Thoroton, coldly and unmoved, as she turned from the couch where her sister lay, "it is over now,—the worst is done, and she will not feel it so much again. I leave her to your care. If she inquire more, you know what particulars to tell her;" and here she whispered over again some former lesson—"she already knows the child was a boy; tell her he was unfitting for her to see, and born without life. Remember now, remember, for all our stories must agree. Keep counsel, we are safe enough now, and you shall be well rewarded."

So saying, she stepped in stately manner out of the room, without even once more casting a look upon the wretched mother whom she had thus vilely deceived and betrayed.

"Let me die," exclaimed the Lady Lavinia, when again she came to herself, "would that God would let me die, for everything is gone now; yes, everything, everything! I feel like the only thing in the world—too miserable to endure. Oh, my Savior—oh, God! pity these woes and take me to my husband and my child!—my child, I say,—my boy, my darling boy!"

And again was that wan face buried in the pillow, and the piteous voice lost in dumb unconsciousness.

Meantime, to change the scene, the woman in the Strand with the living baby on her arm was overtaken by a storm. One of those driving storms of fierce rain and hail which clear the streets of London suddenly, as might a plague. Every alley and entrance court was crowded with those who were incapable or unwilling to pay for better shelter; every recess of a door that offered partial protection contained its compact little body of passengers; every projection screened some miserable creature or other of the night; while tavern and tap-room harbored thickly-packed hosts of the vitiated and depraved, who preferred such sanctuary to that of any other building in the whole vast mass. The lights in the lamps along each side of the way flickered, strained, and roared as the gust half-strangled them while it passed; the torrent rushed furiously down the gutters, stopped up the incapable sewers, and flooded the streets; while one solitary coach remained upon the stand near Somerset House, man and horse alike bearing the brunt of the tempest with down-bent heads, but otherwise as heedless as the stones beneath their feet. Now and then some carriage would drive furiously along, throwing up the pooled water and mud from between the stones higher than the window-tops; or some solitary cur with meekly slouched ears, and eyes half closed against the pelting of the rain, scour spiritlessly along under cover of the wall; emphatically expressing by the peculiar hanging of his tail, what kind of opinion he privately entertained respecting the weather.

Still the woman with the infant perseveringly kept on along the south side of the Strand. Her own clothing, as well as that of the child she carried, was sodden almost to the skin, and hung in straight and heavy folds around her. Slight, however, was the solicitude she evinced for her own comfort, as she once rested her foot upon a door-step in order to take off some of her own covering additionally to wrap up the little stranger that had thus singularly been placed in her keeping.

"Poor little thing!" muttered she, as she adjusted the clothes about it, "he'll never know what it is to have a mother, nor his mother what it is to have him! Lack-a-day, poor creatures, I pity you both."

And then she hugged it closer to her bosom, and trudged onwards patiently through rain and mire, without once even attempting to seek shelter where many others had securely found it.

When arrived at the top of one of the side streets leading to the Thames, she stopped and looked around. The voice of a distant watchman, as he gruffly called the hour, came dis-

tinctly on the passing blast; but other guardians of the night, who kept watch in her more immediate vicinity, had crept under cover of their boxes, and left the coast clear for any one who might perchance have a reason for taking advantage of such a circumstance.

No eye was upon her, and almost before any one could have been turned hitherwards she had disappeared down the dark, steep, and slippery street, at the bottom of which the Adelphi Buildings confronted her, and the arched gaping vaults beneath them, affording various passages to the water-side, opened their black entrance below.

We shall scarcely err in venturing to assert, that the vaults here alluded to constitute one of the most remarkable curiosities, and at the same time one of the least noticed, in the whole range of the metropolis. The entrance to them is through Durham Street and Durham Yard; a spot on which formerly stood Durham House, belonging to the earls and lords of that name. The inclined plane, forming the ancient bank of the Thames, commences precipitately at the line of streets continuous with Maiden Lane, at the back of the Adelphi Theatre, and descends more rapidly as it nears the water's edge. The entrance to the vaults is of a semi-circular form; and immediately over it is the exhibition room, containing the models of machinery applicable to the useful arts, for which premiums have been awarded by the Society of Arts. Of the space of about fifteen yards within the entrance, and on either side from the ordinary cart-way to the wall, the floor of the vaults is strewn with rubbish and filth of all imaginable kinds. To the right and left the dismal arches stretch into an extent absolutely indefinite, from the gloomy darkness in which they are enveloped. In various parts of the roof may be perceived certain blocks of stone, which probably formed a portion of the ancient structure of Durham House; while here and there large masses of brick-work meet the eye, forcibly torn from their places by the combined brute force of the coal-heavers, and of the animals they employ; although for some short distance within the entrance the wall on each side is protected by a rude and heavy wooden railing, which also serves the additional purpose of preventing passengers from falling into a second and lower pit, which leads to a sort of underground stabling. In the several arches are massive doors strengthened with iron-bolted lozenge bars, and still further secured by strong padlocks. A solitary lamp or two glimmers here and there, just making darkness visible, but nothing more. Altogether the Adelphi vaults afford a much more singular and interesting sight than is often paid well for to be seen.

Arrived at the bottom, again she cast a hurried glance around—hesitated a moment, and

entered with a degree of caution which showed that no eye could see a yard in advance, and that the feet alone must guide.

Comparatively few of the people who inhabit this mighty city, would believe, without ocular demonstration, that from the very midst of the eternally busy town, out of the bustle, turmoil, noise, and life of that great artery of London, the far-famed Strand, it is possible at a few strides to transport one's self into a dark and silent range of underbuilt vaults, dimly enlivened with arrow slits, that throw daylight down only in occasional beams and specks; and which by their vaulted and massive roofs, their extent and silence, might readily be mistaken for the dungeon-cellars beneath some old feudal castle, or the crypts of a deserted cathedral.

At the present time the massy doors which formerly used to close up nightly the entrance to these vaults, are rusted upon their hinges and rendered immovable through neglect and the accumulation of rubbish about them. Hence the places they formerly shut in are open by night as well as by day, and latterly have become pretty often the resort and refuge of otherwise roofless outcasts, to whom even the penny lodging-houses of St. Giles's refuse a few hours' shelter during darkness. But at the time of which we are more particularly speaking, they had not been appropriated by that class of unfortunates, and consequently afforded as much secrecy and security for the parties whom we shall soon see collected there, as might the recesses of the Peak Cavern itself in the very heart of stony Derbyshire.

As the woman previously spoken of entered with her little charge, she walked some distance downwards in a straight course, and then cautiously turned to the left; treading upon soft, dry earth and straw, with which the ground was covered, so noiselessly, that even without effort, her footfalls were rendered next to inaudible even to the individual whom she expected, and had gone to meet there.

Having advanced some distance further, and within a short space of another turning to the right which led directly to the water side, she paused doubtfully and listened. Scarcely half a minute could have elapsed while she stood thus, before a voice in the dark void space to the left was heard in a solemn and confident, but low tone, as it said,

"Black as the night is, I know you, daughter; advance and lay your burden down."

A low growl or two of thunder, apparently far down on the horizon over the river to the south, had before been heard; but as the woman obeyed this summons it increased in loudness, and as she advanced, a faint flash of lightning which brightened the dead waters outside, and obscurely penetrated the mouth of the vault which opened on the Thames side, showed her

the gaunt figure of a man standing upright in the corner, and holding between the forefinger and thumb of his left hand a crystal of the form and size of an ordinary hen's egg, into which he was at the present moment deeply engaged in looking.

Though the light was gone as instantly as it had been produced, she found on approaching him that the crystal itself still remained visible. It looked like an orb of dull light, exactly circumscribed by its own dimensions, but incapable of giving out the least light upon even the closest surrounding objects.

"This child is a boy, Agatha, is it not?" demanded the man.

"It is."

"True. I know it. He was born at seven minutes past six to-night, was he not?"

"He was, father."

"True. And he cried once, and only once, when the doctor forced him from the bosom of his unconscious mother?"

"He did not tell me that," replied the woman.

"It is true, nevertheless," answered the astrologer; "I have seen it all by the aid of this faithful spirit in the crystal. And more than that, Agatha—I can tell you that the Lady Thoroton and all her associates will lose their labor. Do as they will with him he must escape with life. In this place I have seen all that has passed out of it respecting him since the moment of his birth. The stars pronounce his greatness, and man cannot hinder it. If we throw him into the river, he will live. If we try to strangle him, some seeming accident will save him. If they were to dash his head against this wall, a chance unseen would give him power to survive. His life is written here, in this stone, and none but He who controls the stars can turn his fate from what is written. Look here. See for yourself, daughter, and be convinced."

Agatha was in truth the magician's own daughter. She was familiar with his power, if power it really were, and feared not to place her eye to the crystal as she had often done before when he commanded her. The moment she did so, it seemed as though the whole air was light. Yet she could see nothing but the strange figures and new scenes pictured like living shadows in that glass. There was much seeming confusion amongst them, as though strife, and contention, and evil passions and good, were violently exercised to obtain one little object, and that object distinctly was a child. Then imperceptibly the scene grew into one composed almost wholly of children of both sexes, classified according to their sex, and somewhat quaintly, though uniformly dressed. Afterwards it changed to one representing the interior of some building, in which many bright and distinct columns were visible, with jars, bottles, and the like, abundantly spread around.

In the midst was a boy about fifteen, busily employed upon something which seemed like a picture; but before Agatha could have time particularly to scrutinize it, a fierce blow from some unseen arm dashed the crystal rapidly from the hands of her father, and at the same time a voice equally passionate in its tone exclaimed,

"Away, thou fool and liar with these devils' looking-glasses! Every word is false. Our labor is *not* lost, and *shall* not be lost."

"Mr. Thoroton," said Saul the astrologer, quietly and without making the least attempt to interrupt him, "your face is familiar to me even in the dark. I know the extent of *your* power, and feel my own. Proceed as best you please."

"I'll see into that glass," exclaimed Mr. Thoroton, who had secretly watched Agatha from the physician's house and dodged her hither in order to satisfy himself of the actual destination of the child, and that his orders were obeyed.

"Then pick it up," replied Saul, for the crystal now lay on the ground, where it had been thrown by the violence of the blow, but still showed itself distinctly like a phosphoric substance in the night.

Thoroton stooped to take hold of it, but somehow, he could not tell why, it slipped from between his fingers. He tried again and again, yet every time with no better success. At length the light which had guided him to it went out, and all three stood in darkness the most intense.

"I said I knew your power," remarked Saul, who had never yet once moved from the spot on which he stood; "and now see mine."

In a moment the crystal was in his hand, without his even stooping to the ground, and as light as before.

"I have read his life for twice seven years," continued Saul, "and no human power can prevent that life coming to pass in action, any more than at the moment of his birth it could have dashed his Giver of Life, the great star in the red Scorpion, from the heaven in which it shines. Whether he will live after fourteen, I know not, for the glass is then darkened by a calamity so deep that its result is hidden by its own clouds."

The astrologer now remained a few moments silent, while the individual who had thus intruded upon him stood dismayed by the words he heard.

"Thoroton!" exclaimed Saul, "be advised by a greater power than your own. Abandon the present design. The heavens are against this evil, and will frustrate it by means that man cannot imagine. Return the child to its mother, and make both happy."

"Never!" interrupted Mr. Thoroton, "especially from the influence of the ravings of this folly and absurdity, which are worse than those

of a maniac. See you, man?"—and he spoke as in desperation—"rather than do that, I would at once dash the life out of him against this wall!"

The sudden thought was followed by as sudden action. For scarcely had Mr. Thoroton uttered these last words, than he snatched the baby from the arms of Agatha, who was standing close beside him, and made a powerful and desperate attempt to throw it violently against the side of the vault. No intervention could save it. But as he whirled the unconscious little burden from him, the outward covering in which it had been wrapped gave way in his hand, and the child fell softly and unharmed upon a heap of trodden straw which had been gathered close beside him.

At that moment the astrologer produced, by unseen means, a light which illuminated the place for the space of a few seconds, just long enough to enable Agatha to snatch the boy up again, and to show the appearance of a black, shadow-like, but deformed figure, as of a demon, which enveloped, as in a mist, the whole person of the intended murderer.

Instantly all was dark again. Agatha rushed wildly out of the vaults by the same passage she had entered them: Mr. Thoroton as madly pursued her in the hope of again seizing the heir of Woodhouselee; and the astrologer, Saul, quietly pursued his way, unheeding the other two, down to the river side. When there, he entered a boat, which appeared to be waiting his command, and was rowed by one dark, voiceless being in a direction down the river, and subsequently across towards one of the most obscure water-side haunts of Bermondsey.

Meantime, Agatha succeeded in getting considerably ahead of her pursuer; and by passing up one of the right-hand streets, soon reached St. Martin's-lane.

Here Mr. Thoroton would, in all probability, have overtaken her, had not at that critical moment the appearance of a shop-door open with a man standing against it a short way before them, caused Thoroton suddenly to slacken his pace, and eventually to desist from his pursuit when he found by her motions that the possessor of the child meditated throwing herself under the protection of the worthy shop-keeper. Such a step, however, his retirement and retreat now rendered unnecessary, though as she passed by the door Agatha could not but look up to see the name of the man to whose timely presence the escape she had just made was mainly to be attributed.

Across the shop, which bore a very old-fashioned frontage of heavy woodwork, was painted in large characters, "Gabriel Widge, Brush-maker and Oil and Colorman to their Majesties." Immediately below, and nearly filling up his own doorway, stood Gabriel himself, his hands in his breeches-pockets, and his face skywards,

for he had come to the door to look at the clouds and the lightning.

"Shouldn't have that babby out this time o' night, my good woman," said Gabriel, wisely, as again Agatha passed him.

She hesitated, and was about briefly to explain, but Mr. Widge, senior, being himself a family man, told her not to stand talking to him, but make off home as fast as she could. And so saying, he turned his back upon the street with the air of one who knows his own weight in legitimate coin of the realm, and closed, bolted, and barred the door behind him.

Agatha soon reached her humble residence in a yard near Long Acre; while Mr. Widge, senior, retired to his bedroom and communicated to Mrs. Widge all the newest intelligence he had picked up from his own observation touching the state of the weather, and likewise passed a very severe comment upon the particular improvidence and general thoughtlessness of the lower orders, "who," he sagaciously observed, "seemed to act as if they thought children were like, gooseberry cuttings, and grew the more, the more they were rained on."

CHAPTER II.

THE SEVENTH SON OF A SEVENTH SON—GABRIEL WIDGE SEES HIS FATHER'S GHOST.

AN important incident, essentially similar to the principal one recorded in the preceding chapter, though mightily different in its working out, was about to take place in the household of Mr. Widge—in other words, just by way of assisting the reader with a little more knowledge than he himself probably possesses, Mrs. Gabriel Widge was in an intense state of expectancy, that within a very brief period she should present Mr. Widge with the seventh child—a prodigy it was confidently anticipated it would turn out; for Mr. Widge himself was a seventh son, and the seventh son of a seventh son, is sure, some way or other, to prove a very miraculous sort of a son indeed.

The happy father of this wonderful fellow was, in his own person, not a whit less remarkable as a man, than was his shop as a shop, or even the lane itself as a lane, in which his residence stood. St. Martin's lane, however sunk in the present day, has boasted of much more clever men than the Widges, either senior or junior, having formerly been inhabited by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and also in his way by the no less well-known Middleton, the first artists' colorman who commenced that business in London. Here also was held the artist's academy, where studied our immortal Hogarth,

Sir J. Thornhill, Frank Hayman, Zoffany, and their contemporaries—a picture of which still exists by the facile pencil of the last-named individual. As to Mr. Widge's residence, it remains even to this day, and still presents a tolerable specimen of the kind of domestic architecture which prevailed in the days of Hogarth—that is, it is adorned with thick-sashed shop-windows, which project into the street, and constitute two small apartments, as it were, for the display of certain choice specimens of colors, lamp-oils, pickles, brushes, and all the other materials of an oilman's shop, the abutments being supported by ponderous brackets beneath; while the gaily-painted imitations of color-tubs, which formerly dangled from a large cornice over the windows (not unlike a gigantic mantelshef) are now, with true antiquarian care, securely affixed to the top of it. On the right-hand is a good specimen of a carved doorway, festooned with flowers; while within the miniature pediment above it, a curious nondescript animal, "neither fish, flesh, nor fowl," puzzles the admiring beholder. With respect to the tenant of this old-fashioned abode, it is sufficient now to say that he will best explain his own oddities as we proceed with our story.

Already had Mrs. Widge blessed her husband with six as arrant, complete, and unmitigated dunces and blockheads as ever wore frontispieces at all approximating to the human face divine: yet, like most blockheads, six healthier, greedier, or more chub-faced louts—for they were all boys—never eat hasty-pudding or sucked birds'-eggs. Everything they took appeared to be absorbed and swallowed instantly up by the body and limbs; while the heads on their shoulders seemed scarcely to take even a tithe of the results of all they put into their mouths; yet the head alone was in reality the only extremity about which Mr. Widge ever evinced any solicitude. He always longed for a boy of talent—a "clever fellow," who might by force of his own individual lustre, throw a shine and gloss upon the whole family. Six times had he hoped ardently, and six times been as deeply disappointed; since not one single idea could he ever succeed in drawing from the young Masters Widge, beyond what he had before, and after much trouble, driven into them. So Mr. Widge used pathetically to resemble himself to a man who wants to draw water out of six wells, but in order to enable himself to do so, is obliged to pour it all in beforehand.

Mr. Widge was a man who happened to know a little bit of most things. Anything connected with trade and the trade modes of making money, he knew especially well; he had been educated in it from fourteen years old—the age of apprenticeship—upwards. But everything else, that he knew, was by halves

quarters, ounces, half-ounces and drachms. Random scraps of information which he had picked up in the course of his earthly career, as a stray cur might pick up a multitudinous variety of food during his peregrinations through the streets, constituted the sum total of his budget of information, literary, artistic, political, theological, metaphysical, and medical. Nevertheless, Mr. Widge, senior, considered himself a clever man in his way, though not half so clever as he might have been, had his father properly cultivated his genius when a boy. Hence arose his very strong desire to have a clever boy himself; and to this are properly to be attributed the many promises he was in the daily habit of making to Mrs. Widge, that if ever Heaven should favor him with a prodigy, he would spend upon him every farthing he possessed rather than run any risk of crushing his genius in the bud.

Under these circumstances, and with these broad and grand notions of doing honors to human talent, it certainly does appear (when soberly and philosophically considered), a most unfortunate thing,—a very pitiable and pathetic thing indeed, that an honest, sober, moral, hard-working, and even slavish individual like Mr. Widge, senior, should have had entailed upon him, all the expense, anxiety, trouble, and hope deferred, of rearing up a batch of children of the description above complained of, without reaping even a single ear of sound and ripe ability in return. Had he been an ordinary man, and of merry, common, and vulgar desires, then might he have been content that the olive branches about his table should have run only into green wood and leaves; but the deep aspirations in which Mr. Widge was frequently wont to indulge, materially sharpened the sting of his calamity, and added poison to those six arrows which, in the shape of six boys, the goddess of Dulness had stuck into his sides.

On that same night, after retiring to bed, Mr. Widge saw, or fancied he saw, or dreamed in a dream he saw, his father's ghost. It announced to him, in accents of delightful promise, that his next son would certainly prove a "clever fellow."

Mr. Widge's father had in his day been a successful shoemaker in Northampton, and after a brilliant career of some sixty years' duration, had departed this life, laden with all the honors and regrets which a generous posterity never fail to heap upon the corpse of him who has labored for them during life, and left a tidy little fortune amongst them upon his departure.

Mr. Gabriel Widge was not by any means a man in the regular habit of seeing ghosts, and therefore he the more firmly believed in the present one, as having appeared to him upon

so great and important an occasion. But we mention the fact more by way of excuse, than anything else, for the curious description which Mr. Widge gave of it. Being unacquainted with the general character of ghosts, their habits, tempers, tastes, and personal appearances, he may have been a little mistaken in the matter; but, however that may be, certain it is he looked uncommonly terrified the next morning, as he gave the following account of his vision to Mrs. Gabriel Widge.

"I don't think, my dear," he said, "I'd been asleep more than an hour or so, when it seemed to me as though somebody called out 'Widge!' three times distinctly; but in a voice such as a man's mouth never uttered. Yet, some how or other, I knew it was my poor father's voice; so I started up in bed, and looked into the room. It was pitch dark, but there he stood the same little old man as he always was, standing in the middle of a beautiful cloud, with his corduroy breeches, a little leather apron, and his old red nightcap on. In his right hand he seemed to hold the shadow of a tacking-end, and the ghost of a lump of wax in his left. There was a sort of glory about him of the same color nearly as the best mustard, which made his face shine yallerish all over, except his chin and cheeks, which seemed to want shaving very bad, as if he had gone without a razor for above a week. Besides that, there was the resemblance of a short pipe in his mouth, or a stick of some sort, I could not tell which; for as the poet Milton says in his immortal 'Paradise Lost,' somehow, 'each seemed either.' He looked uncommon pleasant, just as he used to do when he rapped the 'prentice's knuckles with his lapstone, and says he, 'Gab!' says he, in a sepulchral tone, 'Gab, my boy, I'm going to be grandfather to a 'clever fellow' at last.' 'You're the favored mortal,' says he, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and puffing out the shadow of a cloud of smoke, 'you're the happy hanninal that's doomed to monopolize all the glory of the Widges, and to establish the name of the family in the Hannals of Northamptonshire. That next boy of Missis Widge's'll turn out a clever chap. His guardian angel has decreed it, and so the business is settled.' I," continued Gabriel, "sat confounded in bed, and before I could reply to him, he was about to vanish in a reg'lar mist, when it seemed to me as if I involuntarily caught hold of his coat laps, and called him back again. 'Father!' says I, in a very imploring tone, 'don't be in a hurry to be off just yet, for I have a word or two to have with you.' So at that he comes back again, and stands in the same place as before. This time he had the apparition of a pot of ale by his side, standing on a bit of cloud like a table; and somebody as looked a good deal like the

old landlord of the Green Dragon, close behind him, looking at the ghost of a shilling, as if to see whether it was a good one or not. Just as I was going to speak to him again, a great flash came up from the ground, and it all vanished with a strong smell of hot cobbler's wax, dubbin, and bits of burnt leather. Never had I such a vision, or a dream, in the whole course of my life!"

And Mr. Widge wiped the moisture from his forehead with the night-cap he had just before taken off his head.

"But I hope," he added, after recovering breath, "I hope, my dear, it'll all come true, and that we shall have the pleasure of seeing a clever fellow,—a stiff bristle, as one may term it,—at last born into the family."

"Well, well! we shall see," said the lady, "all in good time, no doubt."

And so they did; for at length that time arrived; the private information given by his grandfather, the ghost, proved true, and the now happy Gabriel Widge was presented with the seventh son of a seventh son, who afterwards was christened Launcelot; for it was the settled opinion of Mr. Widge, senior, that whenever his son should come to be knighted, as he doubtless would, at some time or other, Sir Launcelot Widge, Bart., would sound uncommonly well; and much better than your ordinary Sir John or Sir James. It was therefore with a provident eye to a baronetcy that the hero of this history was named Launcelot.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE ROOF.

EXPLODED as the doctrines of astrology are in our times supposed to be, and ridiculous as the believers in them, and their professors, may be generally regarded, it is notorious, and admits of easy demonstration, that the practice of the mysterious art has many devotees, is believed in by numberless individuals, and, perhaps, really numbers as many practising professors at the present day, as ever it did in any former period of our social history.

In the metropolis and the great towns their strength principally lies, although it extends, through the lesser adepts, throughout the rural depth of the whole provinces. While the number of works upon the subject published in our own times, some of them of a most elaborate and costly character, sufficiently attest the sincerity of those persons who devote themselves to its study. No surprise will, therefore, be felt at the introduction into so modern

a story as this of Launcelot Widge, of a character who might otherwise have been considered as confined to, and only appropriate in the romances of the earlier and darker ages. In fact, the character of Saul, the astrologer here introduced, is pretty faithfully sketched from an individual now living—a sincere believer in the reality of magic arts, a master of certain otherwise unaccountable powers and influences—and a person well-known as one of excellent sense, probity, and education.

Saul had formerly been a man of considerable property, but his wild and untiring pursuit of power greater than man naturally possesses had ruined him. His own gold had evaporated in a long and expensive struggle after the menstruum of transmutation, and which at length he had given up, not because he was in despair, but because his means no longer allowed him to continue it. In natural and artificial magic he was more successful. On a fine night he could show in the air, and apparently written on the face of the moon, such letters as the spectator might require; he could form wishes concerning his friends at many leagues' distance, of which they became within a few moments perfectly conscious, and so could mentally maintain a sort of correspondence with them; he could cause wind, rain, and hail suddenly on the open heaths and downs in the country; he could stare at a toad within a magic circle until, after about twelve minutes' fruitless endeavor to avoid his eyes, it would suddenly leap up, as might a hare when shot, and drop dead from very terror. He could bring back, within a given time afterwards, over the place of a murder, the appearance of the man that had died; he could compel an owl in the darkest night to stoop from the sky and stand within his circle, trembling, until he pleased to let it go; he could also cause voices to be distinctly heard and myriads of shapes to be seen, which no spectator could for a moment have believed before to exist anywhere save in the wildest dreams of the most disturbed imagination.

These do not appear very valuable accomplishments, however in any other sense remarkable. But time, and study, and wealth, had bought them; with much watchfulness, and innumerable nights of sleeplessness, and solitary fasting, and long hours of purification and prayer. As Saul had bought them, so he prized them—the dearer, the more worthy.

And here we may take an opportunity of remarking that the populous and vulgar belief that those who practise the magic art derive their power and influence through the agency of evil spirits, appears, from the forms and ceremonies laid down in that modern and approved work, the "Magus," of Barrett, to be wholly and completely false. Rites, fastings, purifications, and prayers, scarcely to be sur-

passed in their severity by any imposed upon the most patient devotee by any the most austere religious belief, constitute the exercises necessary, during the preparatory stage, for the proper attainment of the objects of the occult science.

While every subsequent operation, such as the invoking of spirits, whether good or bad, is still done in the name of the Almighty, and through the great compulsive power of prayers wherein that name continually occurs, and which thence, it is supposed, no created spiritual and inferior thing can possibly resist. It is held as an axiom, that the better, the more pure in mind and body, and the more holy in life that a man is, the more powerful he becomes as a magician, and the more potent in raising up such spirits whose presence he may at any time require. On the other hand, a bad man has no influence at all; since the powers of evil will not obey one rendered by immorality and crime equal with themselves. To the good alone are they submissive with fear and trembling.

With this brief explanation, which appears necessary to justify us in introducing such a character as that of Saul into the present history, we shall now rest content, and proceed to inform the reader that the astrologer's daughter had been selected some time before by Mrs. Thoroton, to nurse the child of her sister as soon as it was born, and afterwards to bring it up as her own. Agatha, in turn, had consulted her father as to the probable results, the benefit or the evil, that might follow from such a course.

He had appointed her to meet him in the place and on the night where and when we have already seen them, and had pronounced such an opinion as left Agatha no longer in doubt as to the propriety of restoring the child to its mother at the earliest opportunity that should possibly present itself. Her great object, however, was, now she had the babe in her keeping, to take especial care it should not again fall into the hands of Mrs. Thoroton or of her husband—since the recent proceedings of the last-named individual had satisfactorily convinced her, that, for the boy to get into their power again, and for him to disappear at once and for ever, would be one and the same thing.

Previous to the occurrence of the scene that had that night been enacted, Agatha knew not that she was in any manner lending her hand to a work of villany; but had supposed herself employed to nurse a babe that its own mother was incapable of taking care of. Now, however, she knew that darker deeds were in hand than, as an honest though poor woman, it was possible for her to meddle with. Her father had solemnly advised, through the glass of foreknowledge, that the child should be returned to its mother: Mr. Thoroton had vowed

that rather than it should ever again reach her arms he would put it to death with his own hand. She had, then, no alternative, but to wait patiently, to keep the boy secure, and seize the first opportunity apart from the knowledge of the Thorotons, to inform the Lady of Woodhouselee that her baby was alive, and could readily be restored to her.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the mind of Agatha, as she ascended the crazy and creaking old staircase that led to her low and narrow room in the roof of one of the oldest houses then remaining in the neighborhood where she resided. An old woman who tenanted the same house, one Mrs. Cank by name, let Agatha in, and bolted the door behind her, chattering all the while in a querulous tone against the weather, the wind, the cost of coals, and the difficulty of keeping herself warm anywhere but in bed.

"And what's that you've got there?" she continued, casting her eyes on the little load in Agatha's arm; "ay, a baby I see—well, well!—well, well! so the world goes on, and one drops in as another drops out of it."

"Ah!" said Agatha, "but if he gets on no better than he's begun, it might have been better if he had never come into the world at all."

"That's just what us poor creatures always say," moralized Mrs. Cank; "we've nothin' but misery afore our eyes from beginning to end. Here I've lived near these seventy years that I can recollect, and I'm sure I never had what one may call a real happy twenty-four hours in all my life."

"And so Mrs. Cank would have gone on preaching during any indefinite period longer, had not Agatha wished her a good night and hurried up stairs to her own room. It was poorly furnished; a small, hard, and knotty-looking bed occupied one corner, with old hangings that had weathered, like their owner, many seasons, and seemed to have been, like her also, not too often washed. An old print of the Crucifixion, painted in such colors as the Italian boys who dispose of pictures of that kind, usually employ to embellish and adorn their wares, hung over the fire-place; while a small chest of drawers that had never been rubbed since the day they escaped from the hands of the cabinet-maker, and four worn-out rush-bottomed chairs, pretty sufficiently occupied the remaining portion of the apartment.

As Agatha stooped, in order, if possible, to blow a little fire from amongst the ashes which lay at the bottom of the grate, a strange and unusual blast of wind swept round her, and caused her suddenly to turn her eyes upon the little window in the roof—it was wide open—and at the instant she thought she saw something dark, like the figure of a man, lying at full length up the sloping roof, and gazing in-

tenly into the apartment; but instantly the head seemed withdrawn, and she saw no more. At once courageous and terrified, she advanced to the spot, and stretched out her arm to draw in the casement, for it opened outside, but it resisted her efforts, as though held back. Though this circumstance still more alarmed her, she resolutely mounted on to one of the chairs, and again tried with greater force to close the window. At that moment her arm was forcibly clutched, as though in a living vice, by some one outside. She screamed, but another hand was instantly placed over her mouth. A desperate struggle ensued; but within the space of a couple of minutes Agatha was dragged out, and dashed with violence upon the tiling by the strong hand of Mr. Thoroton.

Between the termination of the roof and a low line of wall, four or five bricks high, that rose in front of the dwelling by way of parapet, there ran a broad leaden gutter, which Agatha in the past summer-time had endeavored partially to convert into a garden, by placing therein three or four large cracked and broken flower pots, severally containing the dead remains of a diminutive Scotch fir, about the size of a myrtle, the stump of a cabbage which looked green, if nothing more, the withered and leafless sticks that had once supported an annual creeper now vanished, and a few drenched and rotten bulbs, half buried in the soil, and half exposed to the mercies of the season. On this comparatively diminutive level Mr. Thoroton now stood, as he forcibly endeavored to bind a handkerchief over the woman's mouth in order to prevent her cries being heard by either chance passers along the street or the people within the habitations close upon them. In vain did Agatha exercise all the strength with which the desperate nature of her situation unconsciously armed her; she struggled fiercely to keep her assailant off—to get back into the room, and at length even to hurl him over the parapet. But all her attempts failed; and before she could arouse the neighborhood by her cries, Mr. Thoroton had bound her hands and bandaged her mouth. Instantly he dashed through the window into the room, leaving his victim almost incapable of helping herself, lying along the roof outside. There was a light in the room—the child lay on the bed where his nurse had placed him—more dead, perhaps, than alive, but still crying lustily for that attention which he could not have. Thoroton snatched him up, smothered his voice as completely as possible, and rushed down stairs.

Mrs. Cank had retired to her quarters for the night, but hearing, as she thought, something amiss, hastened up to ascertain what it was. By the time she reached the passage Mr. Thoroton had withdrawn the bolts, thrown the door back, and so far effected his escape that

she saw nothing more than the merest vision of him as he vanished into the pitchy darkness of the night. The old woman instantly again fastened the door, and rushed terrified up stairs into the room Mr. Thoroton had just left, calling upon Agatha the whole time, for no other individual, save that young woman and herself, lived under the roof. No long time was lost in discovering Agatha's situation, as she had by now contrived to reach the window, notwithstanding that her hands were tied together, although she dared not in that plight venture to descend. This, however, she was soon enabled to do, by the assistance of her landlady, Mrs. Cank, who now demanded, and patiently listened to, a recital of the whole extraordinary proceedings. The only probable conjecture Agatha could form respecting Mr. Thoroton's strange appearance in the situation already described was, that on being foiled in his pursuit of her up St. Martin's Lane, he had taken a back course at a rapid pace towards her home, and by the assistance of a spout and some sheds of various heights, which were placed at the rear of the premises, had scaled the low roofs and so crossed the tiled ridge to the window of the chamber which, from his former communications with her before the child was born, he well knew she occupied. Be that, however, as it would, true enough the child was gone, and gone with it all the hopes she had so recently indulged of shortly being enabled to restore it again to its wretched mother.

Notwithstanding her father's confident prediction that the boy would live, she yet believed, from his former conduct, that Mr. Thoroton would assuredly put him to death that night. Even if he did not, was it likely he would live under such treatment? Mrs. Cank declared it "quite impossible," and Agatha herself felt almost irresistibly inclined to adopt the same opinion.

Late and dark as it was, however, she resolved under present circumstances again to traverse the streets and proceed direct to her father's place of abode on the other side of the river. And this determination was scarcely formed before it was put into execution.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWS HOW MR. THOROTON CARRIED HIS PRIZE HOME, AND WHAT HIS LADY DID WITH IT.

SAVAGELY, yet with a feeling of triumph scarcely to be described, did Mr. Thoroton hurry along the streets with the baby grasped closely in his arms, as though fearful lest even the wind that swept by might tear it from him,

or some unseen hand in the darkness snatch it away, and with it all his hopes and his objects of ambition. Reckless what might become of it, he suffered the cold blast to blow into its little nestling-place, and the rain to fall upon it as on a drowned night-flower. It cried, but received only a heartfelt though unexpressed curse upon its existence, instead of the careful solicitude of a mother.

Deeply did Thoroton congratulate himself upon the fortunate step he had taken, and the success which had attended it. Had he not secretly watched Agatha in her progress from the doctor's house, had he not so luckily and unexpectedly been led by her into the strange scene under the Adelphi, or had he not succeeded in recovering the child from the hands of a woman who, he now saw, would have turned traitor to those who had employed her; then, it was evident, the plan laid by himself and his wife must inevitably have failed; the mother would early have been informed of the existence of her child and had it restored, while the dark villany of her own sister and that sister's husband, himself, must at once have been made known to the world.

"Now, however," thought he, "all is safe. The lies of that fool and knave of an astrologer are proved to be lies by the events of this very night. I cannot drown him, nor strangle him, nor dash his head against the wall! But we'll soon see whether a fool's prophecy or my power goes the furthest. No one knows any thing of him now; were he dropped into the Thames the world would wag as merrily as before, and no man be the wiser; or were he pinched in the neck and buried to-night in my garden to make roses redder, and, mayhap, the bloody wall more dark, who should ever find it out? Scarcely an angel himself can see to earth through such a sky as this over head."

And as Thoroton thought thus the baby again cried, and drew from him the muttered words,

"Be still, be still, you little wretch! I'll find you a cradle soon, and one that will only rock with an earthquake, depend upon it!"

So saying, he hurried through the town northwards, until at length the silent and solitary streets became less closely built; wide intervals of waste land lay between the separate masses of building along the wayside, guarded, perhaps, by palings or open rails, though not unfrequently yawning in deep and dangerous unprotected foundations half-built within and then abandoned. The lamps became less frequent as the habitations decreased in number and importance; the streets worse paved, if paved at all; while a few miserable trees, the only sad remnants of nature's past dominion there, half-killed with the encroachments of bricks and mortar, and stripped of every branch and twig which juvenile strength could

sever, gave certain sign that something like the country was at hand. The neighborhood indeed seemed purely in a state of transition from country to town. Rows of houses—or rather indications that rows were intended—some occupied, some empty, and some half-finished, on which notices were painted up "These Carcasses to be Sold," and built of bright yellow bricks on which neither the smoke nor the weather had yet left the least trace of their visits, stood in streets still rough-hewn from the earth, spread with broken bricks, refuse scraps of lime, and loads of oyster-shells; and between-spaces holding pools of standing water from the recent storms, and deposits of mud in sunken cart-ruts half-a-yard deep. Here and there on the embryo causeway lay a little heap of unused mortar dried into stone, and innumerable chippings left by the masons who no long time ago had practised their calling on the spot. Beyond, though now invisible, lay a pitiful prospect of sickly fields covered with consumptive, cane-colored grass, and bounded by broken-down hedges, struggling to look something like green, but fainting in the effort, and interspersed with occasional taller members of the forest, which clearly had long since drawn their last life-blood from the ground, and now survived, like so many pale-faced mechanics out of work, upon the slender stock that they had in happier and more prosperous times laid in. A low wall, half pulled down, divided the embryo road from the fields, and at the corner stood a melancholy ash-stump without a remnant of twig, branch, or bark upon it, and which had evidently been completely worn out of existence, not by age and sickness, but by the incessant climbings of one of those endless hosts of mischievous, ragged urchins that never fail to haunt and prowl about every newly-rising neighborhood. A post with a sign upon it, placed at a little distance from the way-side, notified that the adjoining plots of ground were to be let on building leases; and within a becomingly dignified space of freshly laid-out and newly-walled garden, or rather gravel-ground, hard by, stood a bald, uncomfortable-looking, stuccoed, square residence, which bore on its front, the name of "WOODBINE COTTAGE," done in large characters of cement—the speculation, doubtless, of some moneyed tradesman or the other, who contemplated at length retiring into the solitude and quiet of country life, and spending the residue of his days in the enjoyment of the glorious scenery around him.

Beyond the locality here described, the contemplated streets tapered off and dwindled into actual lanes, fenced on either side with hawthorn, and as rural in their muddiness and misery as any town-sick heart, too long "in populous city pent," could well desire.

from where she was. The sudden dread that came upon her of any living and unknown person being near her, caused her to lay the child down immediately, and make a sudden and desperate rush up the acclivity where she had effected her entrance. The wetness of the previous part of the night had made the ground unstable and slippery—she fell, and at the same moment a hand was upon her shoulder. She shrieked, and instantly lost her senses through very terror.

When Mrs. Thoroton again came to herself, she found that she was seated on the step, and within the recess of her own garden-gate. Not a soul was nigh. The grey of the morning had come, the fields were drownded in white dew, and every twig and web of the field-spider bore a visible load of the sparkling moisture of the night. Was all she had heard and done, so heard and done only in imagination? Had her husband really brought the child home? Had they differed about it? Had she carried it to yonder desolate place and left it? And had any one really seized hold of her when there.

As she mentally asked herself these questions, she arose, and, for the first time, perceived that a precious ornament that bore at the back the portrait of her late brother, and which she had worn since his death upon her bosom, was gone. One furious grasp seemed to have done it, for the dress was torn and her skin grazed by the point which had fastened it. Nothing else was taken.

To go back she dared not, though her curiosity, as well as her fear of having thus lost so valuable a treasure, strongly urged her to do so. Quietly she stole back to her room by the way she had left it. Her husband was not there. She passed into the library. A lamp that stood on the table was yet burning, although day-dawn had made it useless and almost invisible, and near it sat Mr. Thoroton still reading. He raised his head, and regarded her with a stern gaze of some moment's duration, and then turned to his book again without uttering a single word.

Mrs. Thoroton was in hopes he would have questioned her, but she found herself disappointed. By many apparently unintended but significant manœuvres, she endeavored to attract his attention. All were utterly useless. Mr. Thoroton no further heeded them than as though no living thing were in the apartment except himself.

Mortified and wounded in pride, the lady swept silently but haughtily out of the room. And so did Mr. and Mrs. Thoroton part, as man and woman should never part, who hope to be happy afterwards.

In the course of the day she contrived means for ascertaining whether the child still lay in the cellar of the house in the field. It was

gone, and no signs remained to tell by whom taken, why, or whither.

CHAPTER V.

SAUL THE ASTROLOGER.

As Agatha pursued her way along the streets, the dense darkness overhead cleared away and revealed myriads of bright stars and a glorious path of light, the milky way, tracked across the sky from one horizon to the other. The atmosphere was as clear above the great city, both of clouds and smoke, as though neither one nor the other had ever obscured it.

After a long, but rapid, walk through ways crowded so recently, and so soon to be crowded again, though now almost as dead as though no soul breathed amongst them but herself, she reached a train of narrow, business-like streets parallel with the Thames' side, composed of tall warehouses with gigantic doorways, and cranes affixed over them; while at the bottom were placed long and heavy masses of wood, supported by posts, in order to protect the walls from the crush of waggon-wheels during such time as busy life and commerce most asserted their active dominion there. Occasionally the top-masts of vessels lying by the shore were visible between the spaces of the separated buildings, or the great uncouth figure-heads of broken-up ships that had for the last time breast the waves, rose high overhead beside the gateways of the various yards. On some of the walls and corners, the dim light of the street oil-lamps afforded a glimpse of certain coarse and grotesque figures as large as life, painted in flat colors, and representing sailors, wooden-legged, or otherwise, smoking in barbarian mockery of the jolly people they were intended to represent. These were most probably the work of unemployed watermen who, while lounging in hope of a job, had adopted this method of beguiling their idle hours.

These attributes, which otherwise would have passed unheeded, were noticed by Agatha now, as signs unfailing, that she was at length in the neighborhood where her father resided.

At some distance lower down she passed through a narrow side-court, leading out of a dirty and obscure street, and crossed a small wooden bridge over one of the many branches of dock and pond which embarrassed this amphibious region. A strange old scene it was,—a bit of London as it looked to our forefathers three or four centuries ago; composed of low, rickety houses, some built of horizontal planks of wood overlapping each other, some being covered with slates and others with tiles,

fastened on to the walls so as to convey an idea that they were roofed down to the very ground; but all disposed in such picturesque sort that the pencil only could do it justice.

In one small back window alone was any light to be seen, and that was of a deep fiery red; owing, probably to the intervention of a small crimson curtain, that completely covered the four panes of which it was composed, and prevented even the inmates of the opposite dwellings from catching the least glimpse of the interior of the room. That window marked distinctly to Agatha her father's house.

Perhaps he had heard her footsteps, or it might be accident merely, but before she had time to knock he was at the door.

"Come in, daughter," said Saul, "and go up-stairs."

And as he spoke he fastened the door behind her, while Agatha groped her way up the dark staircase that creaked and sprung beneath her feet, as though age had lent flexibility to the else unbending heart of oak of which it was composed. As she trod along the passages and floors, the uneven and hill-and-hollow-like nature of their surface, sufficiently testified that the foundations on one side or the other, or perhaps on all sides, had sunk and settled far differently from their original level; while the fire-place of the room into which she entered, and that was lighted by the window she had seen outside, was split nearly from top to bottom by the giving way towards the water of a heavy stack of chimneys, almost as ample in dimensions as a modern house; and which now leaned threateningly, though perhaps without much real danger, over the thick and sullen water that lay below.

"A dark hour of the morning, this, for you to be out upon," said Saul, as he entered after her; "what news do you bring? Has the child died and cheated the stars?"

"No, father," replied Agatha, "unless Mr. Thoroton has killed him, which seems not unlikely."

"No, no! impossible," interrupted Saul.

"He has stolen him from me," continued the young woman, "and carried him out again into the night, I know not whither."

And then she detailed to the astrologer such particulars of the event alluded to as the reader is already familiar with. During the relation, and whenever Agatha turned her eyes upon the countenance of Saul, she observed, much to her surprise, that he smiled wickedly, and in evidence of it.

"Knew," he exclaimed, as she concluded; "quite right, exactly as I wished, daughter. The plan was well laid, and it works as bravely. Did you believe all I said in the vaults to-night? The wicked live by one trick and the wise by another. I tell you there is some truth in magic, and much delusion. The truth is worth

nothing, though it costs much; the delusion is worth every thing, but costs not a penny. I could see in the dark when you could not, because my eyes were used to it. I saw Thoroton follow you into the vault, and knowing the object he had in view, I told one half you heard only to excite him and to serve myself. Long have I looked out for an opportunity like this, Agatha, and long been disappointed; but it is come at last, and good use will I make of it. They are now in a snare that no agency on earth can extricate them from, save through the door-way of the gallows. My power is wholly on them, and will make for them misery, and for me money. You know, daughter, and your old mother has often experienced, that the world will let no man live in honesty. To practise it truly is to be laughed at as a fool, and to be ruined. Be a man ever so honest when he begins, he is sure to end in some sort or other a deceiver. I have found honesty like a square stone amongst broken and irregular pieces, it will never build in with them till it is itself shattered into fragments and distributed atom by atom wherever it will fit. Say nothing to Woodhouselee—hear nothing—know nothing—act only as I tell you."

"It is not any thing wrong?" asked Agatha.

"Oh no!" replied Saul, "quite fair, all fair. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: and fairness cannot go further than where all are equal. But I will play you such a pretty plot before long, as neither man nor woman living dream of. And I tell thee further, daughter," he drew Agatha near a small glass fixed upon a dark curtain, and bid her look into it, "dost see any thing?"

"Nothing clear," she replied.

"Oh do," answered Saul; "and if Woodhouselee be not mine in the end, instead of theirs, there is no truth in this faith."

Agatha stood mute with astonishment.

"I tell you it shall be mine," repeated Saul; "but a long path, with many a turning in it, lies between it and me."

At that Agatha was not astonished, for she thought it must be a long path, indeed, that would ever carry her father to such a termination.

"And now," he continued, "observe only this caution: let no soul know a word about this matter; let it lie dead within you, until such time as I see fitting to divulge it. For to-night, stay with your mother—she sleeps in the next room but one—as I shall be busy till daylight in preparing that potent water, in the 'alembic' on the fire, for to-morrow. It is much sought after by the people here, for no water in use better fortifies life, and hinders the coming on of age, than that."

The young woman did as she was desired, and remained under the old roof till the next day's light enabled her to return with greater comfort and safety to her own home.

CHAPTER VI.

DISPLAYS MRS. THOROTON'S HYPOCRISY, AND INSTRUCTS THE READER IN THE ART OF "KILLING WITH KINDNESS."

It may already have been surmised that Mrs. Thoroton's considerate nature and deep sisterly feelings were too sensible and acute to allow her, after the occurrence of the events so recently described, to remain long away from the house of the lady of Woodhouselee. Indeed, it was with great impatience she suffered the few hours to pass that must unavoidably be lost before her visit; because she knew her presence must be wanted, and feared lest any untoward circumstance might occur, which for very good reasons were far better prevented.

Accordingly, she hurried thither as early as possible; and immediately on her arrival privately, though very eagerly, inquired of the nurse whether she had heard any thing whatever of the woman to whom the child was put out, since last night?

"Not one word, good ma'am, I do assure you; but I dare say the poor thing is doing as well as can be wished."

"Then understand me, nurse, distinctly," replied Mrs. Thoroton without heeding the latter portion of her reply; "no message or communication of any kind, or from any party, goes into that room," and she laid her finger into the air, pointing towards her sister's chamber; "not a word must be said to her, nor a hint of any kind given, unless with my knowledge and approbation. Nothing is amiss yet,—but call the servants together, and I will impress it forcibly upon them myself:—they will notice and obey my words."

The whole household was accordingly summoned below stairs; and when Mrs. Thoroton, after some delay, appeared amongst them, she certainly proved herself quite as good as her word.

"Now Mary," she began, "and you Ann, and you Betsy,—do you hear I am speaking, Betsy? Then attend, if you please!"

All present here looked uncommonly awestricken, and five or six great blushing faces, and as many pairs of unmeaning lustrous eyes were turned towards the severe countenance of Mrs. Thoroton. Having thus fixed their undivided attention upon herself, the lady continued, pausing emphatically between each name:—

"Now, Mary;—Ann;—Betsy;—and you, John;—all of you, in fact, one the same as another,—you all know the very serious state, under Providence, that your mistress is in?"

Mary looked despondingly at Ann; Ann did the same towards Betsy; Betsy repeated it in the face of the little footboy; and John, who combined coachman and waiter at table in his own person, devoutly mumbled,—“Yes, um!”

"Now, attend to me," continued Mrs. Thoroton. "I shall not have the *slightest noise* made in this house for at least the next month to come; or whoever makes it, makes it at the peril of her or his place! The whole superintendence of the establishment is mine, while your lady continues unable to attend to it herself. And I will discharge instantly—yes, instantly—any one that dares to give her the least disturbance. That dropping of fire-irons, rattling of dinner-service, brushing of bells in the hall, banging of doors, and such like noises, shall be entirely prevented. At the same time, mark particularly,—now attend to this,—I say mark particularly, that neither notes, nor letters, nor packets, of any description, no matter what, are taken in or admitted, except I know and approve it. Every note and card send up to me; or my dear sister may receive very serious shocks, in her delicate state, from untimely and needless intrusion. And you especially, John,—and you, boy,—take particular care to keep off all low and mean people, either men or women; they only set the dogs barking, and makes noises really intolerable. Now, if I find any one of these things neglected in the least, I will discharge you all immediately."

And so saying, Mrs. Thoroton returned up stairs, while her audience crept off, on their toes, to their several destinations, deeply impressed at once with a sense of her strictness as a mistress, and with admiration of the extreme care and solicitude she evinced for her sister.

If ever the observant reader has remarked a worm in his progress along the soil,—how, from a short and broad body he suddenly elongates himself into something little less than a foot long; or, if ever he may have contemplated his own portrait in the shining concavity of a silver spoon, and seen his face drawn out to an extent most unnatural and painful to contemplate,—then can he form a tolerable conception of the transformation which, in an incredibly short space of time, Mrs. Thoroton's countenance underwent, as she entered her sister's apartment.

"How glad I am to see you!" faintly exclaimed the Lady Lavinia, as Mrs. Thoroton walked with cautious silence up to her bedside; "I have not one left in the world but you, Clarice, to comfort me now. They are all gone before me,—all!"

"But you must learn to bear misfortunes, my dear," replied Mrs. Thoroton, "very easily. The decrees of Providence should be obeyed to, though sometimes they seem to be hard to bear. I can easily suppose a lady to say—"

"Not all," answered the invalid: "oh, no; not all!—nobody can know that. If that dear baby had but been spared to me, I think I could, perhaps, have endured the rest for his sake. But death on death like this,—to have lost my

husband and my child together;—indeed, Clarice,—indeed, it is more than I can bear. I cannot live under it; I know I cannot! I shall soon be where they are; I feel I shall. So much good that an hour's quiet rest would do me, and yet I cannot sleep. My brain sounds like a rising tide, and the moment I fall asleep I see them both, as plainly as though they were alive, and every thing was right, and I were happy. Just now,—but as you came in,—I had such a pleasant vision——”

“Never heed it,” answered Mrs. Thoroton, interrupting her; “I feel for you very much,—it is a deep affliction, truly; and though I can talk to you like this, I am sure I know not how you are to get over it,” here she pretended to cry; “but you must do your best, and support yourself as God may give you power to do. Look to Him, my dear Lavinia; look to Him, for He is our consolation in all trouble.”

“But are you sure my baby is dead?” demanded the lady. “Did you see him yourself, Clarice?”

“Poor thing!” exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton, with her handkerchief to her eyes; “poor little innocent, I hope he is happy now; happier than if we had him under our own care at this moment.”

“Would that I were gone too!” ejaculated the lady; “for this world is dead to me now!”

“But I am here,” replied her sister; “and you must not forget me, my dear. Keep your spirits up; cheer up, and forget it: no, I do not mean forget it, for that is impossible; you must think about it a little, but make no more of it than you can help.”

“Then is he buried?” again demanded her sister, heedless of the advice thus kindly given.

“What else could we do?” asked Mrs. Thoroton. “I should have liked you to have seen the poor, sweet creature before, but it would have been of no use, and you were in no condition to endure such a shock as that.”

“And was he like your brother?” demanded Lavinia.

“A beautiful child,” answered Mrs. Thoroton, as her lips quivered with the lie upon them; “as handsome a little thing as ever sod covered.”

The mother sobbed aloud, and sank into hysterics.

“Attend to her, nurse,” whispered Mrs. Thoroton to that official personage; “and when she is better, call me up-stairs again.” And so saying, she walked well satisfied out of the apartment.

No long time, however, elapsed before she was again summoned thither, and re-entered it to repeat the experiment so recently performed upon her sister's feelings.

“I know I shall die, Clarice; I must die!” exclaimed the invalid.

“We all must die at some time or other,” re-

plied Mrs. Thoroton, “the strong as well as the weak; and it behoves us to be prepared as far as we can; for no one knows what an hour may bring forth. But you must not be cast down; though, I am sure, I scarcely know how you can be otherwise. If my poor brother could but know what you suffer now——”

“He *would* pity me; he would, indeed!” added Lavinia, bitterly; “but tell me one thing—where is the poor child buried?”

Mrs. Thoroton had need of all her cunning to hide her confusion, and evade this inquiry, but she effected her object by replying in a beseeching tone,—

“Now, do not ask such questions, dear. They are quite useless now; they can answer no good purpose, and only distress both yourself and me. I must leave you, if you will persist in talking so. Be satisfied, my dear, that the best has been done by all parties; but where we cannot save, we must learn to endure.”

As the lady of Woodhouselee turned her eyes upon her sister during the delivery of this speech, she observed that the miniature of her late brother, Sir Stephen, which she had so ostentatiously displayed around her neck ever since his death, was gone. Full of fears, from the slightest causes, she mentioned the circumstance to Mrs. Thoroton; and was informed by the latter lady, that she feared she had lost it last night, but how, or where, it was impossible to tell: though, as she said this, her cheeks unconsciously grew pale, as the conviction came strongly over her mind, that if ever it were found again, there might also be found with it one who would bring upon her ruin and infamy.

While the conversation last related was proceeding, a disturbance below stairs had gradually been growing, until, at the period already pointed out, it arrived at a climax, and demanded the instant personal attention of Mrs. Thoroton, as that lady found her recent orders and instructions were being violated in a flagrant manner.

On reaching the yard, Mrs. Thoroton found John, the coachman, engaged in a personal struggle with a tall, spare-looking man who bore very much the appearance of one of those poor Turks who vend rhubarb in the streets of the metropolis, although his habiliments were of a superior order. A turban covered his head, striped blue-and-white trousers clothed his lower extremities, while a frock or gown of similar stuff, though of plainer color, enveloped his body. His pointed beard was dark in color close upon his chin, but gradually increased in lightness until it became perfectly grey at the extremity: while his sharp dark eyes now almost burned like live coals as he fiercely and indignantly repelled the assaults of the sturdy coachman.

It appeared that shortly after Mrs. Thoroton had been reading the servants the admirable lecture before described, and while yet the striking points it contained were impressed with all their force upon their minds, the stranger whom we have thus introduced to the reader's notice, had applied at the door, and requested to be allowed to make a communication to the lady of Woodhouselee.

As this individual seemed, to the true English eyes of John, to fall very naturally into Mrs. Thoroton's category of "low and mean people," and as, moreover, the dogs appeared to entertain much the same opinion, by barking furiously at him as he appeared in sight of their quarters, John unhesitatingly and peremptorily denied him; and having, during the course of his efforts to prevent the least noise, been joined by that corps of guards from the kitchen and bed-room already alluded to, was instigated and irritated from one thing to another, until the greatest disturbance was raised in order to prevent one, that had ever been known upon those premises.

Mrs. Thoroton's appearance at the scene of action caused John partially to relax his struggle with the stranger, and to endeavor to disengage himself from his grasp. This effort threw a momentary advantage into the hands of his antagonist, of which he was not slow to make use.

"Infidel dog!" he exclaimed, as his dark brown fingers fiercely grasped John by the throat, in readiness to hurl him to the ground, "thou beardless ruffian, away from me!" and suiting the action to the word, he flung him backwards with such force and suddenness amongst the affrighted girls who stood behind him, that though several escaped, yet one was borne along with him, and John and Betsy instantly rolled together on the ground.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said the stranger, who evidently was less of a Turk than of an Englishman, "I ask your pardon, madam," and he turned towards Mrs. Thoroton, "for this conduct before you, but your servant's incivility, and his brutality in first striking me, must be my excuse for it."

Mrs. Thoroton's surprise on hearing such words from such a man, was not unmingled with something both of curiosity and suspicion; her own recent acts having rendered her jealous of almost every thing, either with or without occasion. But more especially was that suspicion increased when the stranger further informed her, that his business was with the lady of Woodhouselee, to whom he brought information of a near relation of hers that she did not at present know to be alive, but of whom she would be most delighted to hear.

"A near relative!" thought Mrs. Thoroton, as her cheeks paled at the stranger's words, "it

is the child,—it must be so,—and this man has got to know something of it." And then the fearful scene she had gone through but a night ago, and the recollection of the unseen hand upon her breast, and the footsteps in the dark along the floor, came vividly to her mind's eye. Was this the same person that now stood before her? The consciousness of guilt alone raised that question, for when she again looked at him, how unlikely did it seem that such an individual should have been lurking on such a night in the miserable foundations of the half-built house wherein she had deposited the child. Abandoning the thought, then, almost as soon as formed, Mrs. Thoroton readily reassured herself, and assuming that art of indifference which her natural deceitfulness of character enabled her so easily to adopt, she at once coolly proceeded to inform him that the lady of Woodhouselee was in no condition to see any one, scarcely even her own dearest friends, much less one who was an entire stranger, making application under such peculiar circumstances.

"If your statement be true," she continued, "either make it in writing, which is the least difficult mode,—or, as I am that lady's own sister, acting in every sense for her as she might for herself,—you may, if you prefer it, make your communication at once to me. I am not aware that we have any near relative whatever, such as you speak of, in whom we are interested; and you may be assured beforehand, that the false and idle claims of poverty, pretending connexions of this nature, will meet with their proper punishment."

"Madam!" replied the stranger, "you will at once admit that my information is perfectly true when you have heard it. Nor is it of less importance to yourself than to the lady of this house. He I speak of, madam, is *your own brother's child*."

And the peculiar emphasis with which he uttered these last words, accompanied as they were by a piercing look that spoke still more than they did, evidently caused the lady to start with a degree of agitation which she in vain struggled to repress.

"You had better walk into the house," said Mrs. Thoroton, as she turned and led the way. The stranger did as he was commanded, much to the astonishment and indignation of John, who could not now but feel as though beaten upon his own dunghill, and that by thus admitting him into her presence, Mrs. Thoroton was acting contrary to her own injunctions.

However, John was a servant, and conceived that it was a part of his duty to wait on the outside of the door of the room until the stranger departed again, at the same time giving the lady to understand that he was within call, by either mock-coughing, or by walking about just loud enough to be heard. And the more

especially did he put himself on the alert on this occasion, because the stranger was not only a foreigner, but had already proved himself, in John's opinion, a thorough ruffian, and one very likely to attempt either the robbery or the ill-treatment of Mrs. Thoroton in case she did not comply with his demands.

As John rapidly ran through these reflections he was suddenly stopped in his train of thought by hearing Mrs. Thoroton demand of the stranger who he was and what was his name.

"Ah!" muttered John, "tell your name, you willan."

"My name, madam," he answered, "is Benassar, and I am a merchant."

"Deals in lumps of rhubarb, I'll swear," thought John; "but I'd see him hanged before I'd buy a single ha'porth on him; it would never physic nobody if they took a cartload."

"Your appearance," continued Mrs. Thoroton, "does not very well support that description."

"Divil a bit," thought John.

"Possibly no more, madam," replied Benassar, "than some other people's actions support their appearance. You know whether that remark be true. To be a sister and act unlike one, is quite as probable as that a man's profession and appearance should not agree."

If Mrs. Thoroton's countenance could have been seen at that moment, her whole crime would have been as plainly read in it as in a book. The inference which her own conscience instantly drew as to the point and particular meaning of those words, although couched in such a general form, was told in every muscle and feature. She tried to speak, but her agitation prevented anything more than half articulated and incoherent words. She sank down upon a chair, trembling in every limb, and as pale and corpse-like in countenance as was that sister herself upon whom at that instant her whole thoughts were fixed.

"Madam," continued Benassar, observing her emotion, "although I am to you a stranger personally, *your* tenderness, and kindness, and affection, to *your* sister, is well known to me. Your comfort is that, you love your dead brother's wife as well as you loved him."

"I know nothing of what you mean, fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton, in a desperate agony of mental pain, and with an effort which, though it boldly told the lie, at the same time betrayed as plainly that it was one.

"Shall I explain myself?" replied the stranger, with that cold sternness of manner which most makes cowards of the guilty.

"It is an idle tale," answered the lady, falteringly, "this is some deception or other attempted to be imposed upon me."

A tremendous cough, evidently manufactured especially for the occasion, here announced the fact that John was within call.

Instead of assuring the lady, however, it only had the effect of rendering her agitation more apparent—the very servants must have overheard all that had passed. She darted to the door with mingled fear and passion in her looks, and suddenly threw it open. The faithful John as instantly fell full length at her feet, exclaiming, "I'm in call, my lady, I'm in call!" by way of apology we suppose for having been found so uncommonly close to the door that when it was opened his prop was withdrawn and he could no longer maintain the perpendicular. And certain indeed he was "in call," though in a somewhat different sense to that in which he intended; for inasmuch as Mrs. Thoroton happened at the moment to be in a temper of that peculiar kind which, like a dry barrel of gunpowder, is in a high state of perfection for going off, providing only a proper object for "blowing up" do but offer itself; John, unfortunately for himself, presented too tempting a morsel to be resisted, and accordingly received from the tongue of the lady such an effective fire as made him heartily wish himself twenty miles *beyond* call rather than where he then stood. He was ordered down stairs immediately and the door shut in his face.

Notwithstanding all this, John had scarcely reached half way down the staircase, before he came to a stop, and finding his shoes rather inconvenient, he quietly took them off and carried them in his hand up stairs and back again to the place from whence he had come. He was now anxious not to disturb Mrs. Thoroton and her visitor any more, either by the tread of his shoes or by coughing, or, in fact, by any other possible means to let them suppose he was in the vicinity; although he still felt it his duty as an honest and good footman to keep watch in case the lady *should* find herself mistaken in her man, and require his assistance after all.

Meantime, Mrs. Thoroton had re-entered the apartment and crossed to her seat without once casting her eyes upon the odious stranger whom in her very heart she would have expelled the place, had not at once anxiety to ascertain the extent of his knowledge, and fear lest by offence he should be driven to make use of it, restrained her.

By the interruption that had taken place, he appeared altogether unmoved; but as soon as Mrs. Thoroton had regained her chair, he took up the subject of their conversation much in the same place where it had been left.

"Whether my tale be an idle tale, madam," he resumed, "or whether it be a piece of imposture, your own conscience, and the condition of the childless mother now under this roof, best can answer. Disguise and denial are useless. To save time let me tell you I know all about it, your motives, your proceedings, and your intentions. Your husband, madam, is the guilty man. Poor as I am, and proud as you

are, the liberty of you both, if not your lives are in my power."

"Our lives!" exclaimed she, terrified.

"Your lives," repeated the stranger, calmly.

This passed before John stood sentry at the door again, and was therefore unheard by him. But his capacious ears, not unlike in size to two oyster shells, caught the next following sentence.

"The case is this. A crime has been committed; I know the parties—so do you. I want money—"

"Dang it, I'm right at last," thought John, "he means robbing her; but I'm in call, my lady, I'm in call though you don't happen to know it!"

"Money I must have," continued Benassar.

"Money he must have," mentally repeated John. "Ay, so every body says, '*Money I must have.*' Very fine, no doubt; but don't you wish you may get it?"

"I apply to you, madam; the reason is evident, and need not be explained. Your necessity will make you my friend, as my necessities have deprived me of every other. If not, half-a-dozen words from me will—"

"Hush,—say no more," interrupted the lady, "I see we are betrayed, and lost for ever!"

"It is a heavy crime," remarked the stranger, improving the advantage already gained over her, "but you have only to follow the example of one half the world besides,—*purchase* a good name, pay me the price for it,—my lips are closed, and you are safe."

With some difficulty was it that Mrs. Thoroton reconciled herself so suddenly as was required to the altered state of her prospects, and the demands of the stranger. She reflected that the child was only lost, not dead; although it *might* be dead, and in all probability was so. Perplexed in what manner to proceed, and foreseeing into what endless difficulties, what anxieties, and what a state of absolute dependence and slavery to a poor and common man, both herself and her husband would be plunged for the whole remainder of their lives, unless some means were devised to extricate themselves at once from the difficulty, Mrs. Thoroton remained some time with her eyes apparently fixed on the ground, though in reality they saw no image in her abstraction,—revolving, as well as her confusion and disorder of mind would permit, by what method to save herself and her husband, or in what manner now to proceed.

At length she ventured to inquire of the stranger, in so low a tone that it did not reach John's ears, whether he knew what had become of the child.

"Perfectly well," replied the stranger.

"Then, if you will restore it," replied Mrs. Thoroton, with more firmness and earnestness than she had hitherto spoken, for the chance

of redemption and of turning from an evil thing, gave her momentary courage, "if you will enable us to recover it again, I will reward you with almost any thing you can ask."

"Oh, oh!" thought John, "I see now. My Lady Thoroton has lost some jewels or other, and this fellow had found them. Ay, ay,—that comes of walking the streets with rhubarb, I might take to it myself if I were out of place, and my livery wasn't good. She'll pay him well for that."

Mrs. Thoroton's proposition, though the result of a sudden thought, was, indeed the only safe and useful one she could make; and well did Benassar know its extent, as he replied,—

"One crop will not content any man that has power to pluck the fruit year by year. It is useless to make other proposals. I have already named them. Give me money, and you have nothing to fear."

Still the lady clung to that one hope, as though it were her last; and long did it take to convince her finally, that no other terms than those previously named could be made.

"Then," she exclaimed, half starting up, and assuming all her accustomed dignity of manner, "I tell you, man, that you shall be compelled!"

"Compelled" repeated the stranger, smiling. "See you, madam," and his features suddenly assumed the stern fixedness of stone; "if this money be not lent me at once,—now, at this moment,—you shall be apprehended,—you and your husband—within half an hour!"

"Whe-w,—whe-w!" whistled John, as he thought to himself they were drawing it rather strong, and that Mrs. Thoroton would soon be very glad to find that he was "within call." But what could he mean about apprehending? On reflection he recollected that apprehending is the same thing as comprehending, and with this solution he felt satisfied.

In the next half minute he heard a heavy purse placed upon the table, and, by its chink, again taken up.

"We will regard this, madam, as a loan," said the stranger; "I am no beggar. And whenever more may be required, I doubt not you will be considerate enough to renew the obligation."

At that moment the bell rang, very much to the alarm of John. However, he slipped on his shoes, and allowed a sufficient time to elapse for his getting up stairs, and then looked innocently into the room.

"Attend the door!" said Mrs. Thoroton.

John walked out; and the stranger bowed, and followed him. Somehow, now he enjoyed the opportunity, John did not feel disposed either to kick him down stairs, or to pluck a handful out of his beard. He had thought better of it, perhaps, and come, in his cool moments, to a more Christian determination.

Before quitting the hall door, Benassar slip-

a guinea into his hand, at which John felt wonderfully astonished. He instantly, however, found a change coming over the spirit of his dream concerning the stranger, and settled in his own mind that, if he himself came in every time for such a portion of the spoil, he should not care how often the present visitor came to borrow money from Mrs. Thoroton. While, below-stairs, on being questioned by the servants, he represented the recent visitor as a rich Turkey merchant, notwithstanding his dress, and one who knew as well how to behave himself when he tried, as any that ever entered the house.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

ILLUSTRATES MASTER LAUNCELOT WIDGE'S AMAZING POWERS WITH THE KITCHEN POKER: AND RELATES A CURIOUS EXPERIMENT WHICH HE TRIED UPON HIS FATHER'S NOSE.

SCARCELY had that clever fellow, young Master Launcelot Widge, been in the world seven days, before he was unanimously declared by all admiring relatives and friends, to present a most uncommon likeness to his father. So though Gabriel himself; and the more especially did he try to persuade every body so, because, by implication, the latent abilities existing in the child, seemed somehow to become thereby as it were all his own.

Now, if the reader can imagine the bottom end of a lemon converted into a human countenance, the setting-on of the stalk marking the nose, and two little twinkling and scarcely perceptible eyes, with a crumpled crack for a mouth super-added, then can he imagine the features of Mr. Gabriel Widge. And as Launcelot was declared to bear such a striking resemblance to his great progenitor, we can only say that, if he did, he must have been an uncommonly comical-looking baby indeed.

Like or unlike, however, certain it is that his father was remarkably fond of him, and displayed his affection in every way that a good father could think of. In the absence of other more convenient commodity he ordered him asses' milk, from the Purveyor of Asses' Milk to the Royal Family himself: although it was not without some slight compunction at first that he did so, as fearing the future baronet should imbibe, along with the fluid, any thing of the

peculiar nature and attributes of that singular animal, and thus fix it immovably in the constitution of both his body and disposition.

Besides this, Mr. Gabriel Widge very strongly impressed upon the mind of Mrs. Widge, that not one mother in ten thousand knew any thing at all about the nature and wants of a newly-born infant: and although she had already, as previously stated, blessed him with six surviving and strong and healthy specimens of male humanity, he still insisted very pertinaciously upon the fact that one half of the deaths occurring during the two first years of existence, were ascribable to mismanagement and to errors in diet.

"Widge!" exclaimed she, "you have no occasion to complain to me about that; I say, look at your own six boys."

"I tell you," replied Gabriel, "it is a bad plan to cram a biscuit into a child's mouth as soon as it begins to cry, and before you know what it is crying about. If it's lost a toy, you stuff some of your nasty sweet-meats into its throat the consequence of which is natterally a colic; and then, to cure the colic, you give it peppermint-drops; and to get rid of the peppermint, you give it apples or oranges; and to get rid of the apples and oranges, you stuff it with cake and bun; and then to remedy cake and bun, you give it—the Lord knows what, for I don't—only I know there's a system of cram, cram, cram, going on from daylight to daylight again."

"Did I ever cram 'em like that, Widge?" seriously demanded the lady.

"I didn't say you did—"

"Yes, but you did say so," interrupted Mrs. Widge.

"No, no!" exclaimed Gabriel; "I said what I say still, that nine hundred and ninety-nine mothers out of every ten thousand act in that way—and so they do. But I can only say that little Lance shan't be spoiled in such a fashion: I'll take care of that!"

And so saying, Mr. Widge very cautiously and carefully introduced, with the thin end of a tea-spoon, a very respectably sized sop into the facial orifice of the baby, which at the moment he chanced to be hugging lovingly on his left arm.

It so happened that Master Launcelot proved to be a very cross-grained and naturally ill-tempered child, as he generally contrived, by his squalling and bawling, to keep the otherwise sleepy Mr. Widge remarkably lively and "wide awake" from midnight till about six in the morning. But so far was the hopeful father from complain-

ing of this circumstance, that he regarded it as a happy and future omen of future greatness; and explained to his wife that all great geniuses were of an excitable nature; they were an irritable, self-willed, domineering race of mortals, and must be endured and indulged, by the less favored of mankind, in all their whims and caprices, in consideration of the astonishing productions which, by way of atonement, as it would seem, they were in the habit of giving to the world for the benefit, not of the present time only, but of countless generations yet unborn.

Mrs. Widge did not augur quite so enthusiastically from this circumstance as her husband did, that Lance was destined to become a great man. In her more humble and woman-like opinion, there were plenty of nasty, fretful, and peevish little plagues that almost worried their parents' lives out, and never turned out anything more at last than ugly, dwarfish, wrong-headed creatures—a kind of prickly hedgehog in their own families, and a nuisance to every body else besides. Gabriel, however, would not hear anything of it, protesting that all such animals as she spoke of were purposely intended by nature as the crabs and sloes of the garden of humanity; whereas children like Lance were only a sort of ripe peaches, hard and sour at first, but amongst the richest and most delicious when fully matured. In fact, on this point the amiable pair could never agree; since Mrs. Widge observed nothing in the manners of Launcelet which she had not previously remarked in every baby-blockhead she had brought into the world; while Mr. Widge, on the contrary, stored up everything connected with him with marvellous veneration; anticipating that, when his name and actions should come to be inscribed in some future edition of the "Biographical Dictionary," these interesting reminiscences of early childhood would be considered invaluable.

"Happy," he would exclaim with fervor, "happy would it have been for mankind if every great man's father had been a Widge, and, foreseeing the future eminence of his son, had marked the growth of his genius, room the arms of the nurse, upwards! Then historians would have had no cause to complain of the scanty materials too often left for the compilation of their lives."

Mr. Widge kept a very sharp and active look-out for the first development of talent, and in what particular line it lay, which his son might chance to make; but during a long period he remained in a state of deep parental suspense and miserable indecision. Reversing the expression of Shakspeare,

Launcelet "lived, and made no sign." True, at one time his father set him down for a first-rate green-grocer, on a grand scale, such a remarkable predilection did he evince for oranges, apples, cherries, and cucumbers; at another he held him as determined for a merchant dealing in dried fruit, so uncommon a genius did he display in the selection of the best raisins, almonds, pippins, and the like, which not unfrequently appeared on his father's table. But these glimpses of ability were not exactly in accordance with Mr. Widge's taste, and he resolutely shut his eyes upon them in the hope that something else more worthy of the name and family of the Widges would eventually shine through this its last-born representative.

The time, however, was nigh at hand when the anxious father should finally be satisfied of the bent of his son's genius, and become practically convinced, after a tedious expectancy, of the truth of the saying, that "it is a long lane that has no turning." Launcelet was really about to round the all-important corner!

Amongst other efforts which Mr. Widge permitted him with the perseverance of impunity to make, as one in which, in common with most hopeful youths of a similar disposition, he displayed surprising dexterity and juvenile skill. Having been provided early with a shilling box of water-colors, Launcelet soon put it into active operation, by illustrating with red, blue, green, and yellow, nearly every copperplate contained in the volumes composing Mr. Widge's library. With the back of his hand for a palette, his mouth for a pot of water to dip his pencils in, and his variously colored little bricks spread over the table cloth, Master Launcelet embellished and illuminated, with glorious patches and in most fanciful style, both figure and landscape under all their varieties. Sacred subjects, history, portraits, and familiar life, were alike to him; the extent and comprehensiveness of his genius enabled him to master each with equal ease, brilliancy, and rapidity of execution. The same sap green that enlivened his landscapes as far as the eye could reach, equally delighted the eye of the spectator upon the coat of Sir Isaac Newton, the neckcloth of John Milton, or the hose of Shakspeare; while to the faces of those worthies was transferred, with equal fidelity, the deep brandy color that shone so conspicuously on the walls of all his architectural subjects; though, to do him justice, we must add that sometimes his flesh colors were varied with strong yellow-ochre and Indian-ink.

Nor was it in coloring alone that he thus distinguished himself. Every individual upon the premises was familiar with his power as a draughtsman and general carver in wood. To that power nearly every white-washed wall, and many door-posts and doors, bore ample testimony. His nail scratches on the former, and the industrious blade of his pocket-knife on the latter, blazoned his skill in those two arts to all who had eyes to see. The water-butts and pipkins bore many a fleet off his building upon their bosoms; while race-horses ran gallantly away, houses and churches rose in horrible perspective, and men's heads grinned in ludicrous deformity around.

Having spent the greater part of a day on a visit to certain young acquaintances of his, who displayed abilities nearly rivalling his own, Master Launcelot Widge returned home one evening, with signs of more than usual anxiety, and of speed, to begin some great work, visible in his countenance and actions. Projects of importance, and that admitted not of impediment or delay, were evidently revolving in his fertile imagination; while the determination to set to work immediately, which his resolute and desperate manner seemed to imply, charmed Mr. Widge, senior, with the delightful thought, that some extraordinary outbreak of genius was going to be the result, and that, at last, the deity of the arts had descended upon him in reality.

"Well, Lancy, my boy," said Mr. Widge, from behind his counter, as he loosened his apron-string, and smiled upon the entrance of his darling genius from the street; "how have you enjoyed yourself, Lancy?"

But Lancy was too much occupied with his own projects, too big, as we may say, with the god within him, to condescend to give his father an answer. He marched heroically down the whole length of the shop, utterly regardless of the teasing and insignificant question put to him by his parent, and was about to enter a door at the remote end which led to the private part of the dwelling, when Mr. Widge, senior—undaunted by the contempt of his son, and uncommonly patient under this display of his manners—again returned to the charge, by calling in a louder voice,—

"Lance, d'y'e hear me? I say, what are you going about in such a hurry?"

"Can't stop now," replied Master Launcelot, without turning his head, and, at the same instant, slamming the door behind him, as he disappeared down the steps leading to the kitchen.

"Now, that boy has some plan or other in his head," reflected Mr. Widge, "that

he will not let me know of. He's after something fresh, no doubt."

And so he was. Knowing, by the peculiar noise he made, that her youngest son had returned, Mrs. Widge called distinctly to him from the first-floor landing, but he would not hear her under any circumstances, as having much more important matters in hand than talking and bothering with his mother.

The maid chanced to be engaged in the process of ironing in the underground kitchen, when Master Launcelot descended into it.

"Now, stand away," said Lance, striding towards the fire, and suiting the action of his hand to the words, "I shant have none of your ironing here: I want that table myself, and the fire and all."

"Law! you mustn't touch them irons, Master Launcelot," exclaimed Polly, in a consternation, as she observed him knocking the articles in question under the grate; "missis'll go on so as nobody niver heard."

"What do I care about missis?" muttered Launcelot, in a tone of bravado: "I tell you I must have this fire, and you may finish your things when you can."

So saying, he crammed about half a yard length of the huge kitchen poker between the bars, and at the same time informed Polly that if she meddled with it he would throw it at her head."

"There's plenty of room for them irons as well," remarked Polly, "and I am sure they won't interfere with your poker."

"I tell you I shant have 'em in," peevishly replied Launcelot, who seemed to think that his poker, or the purpose to which it was going to be devoted, was too sacred to be for a moment associated with such base company as a family of smoothing-irons.

And, with a renewed charge to the maid to abstain from even touching the article so familiar to her, he darted back again up stairs into the shop, and commenced a thorough search after something, though nobody save himself knew what.

"What are you looking for, Lance?" demanded the father of the genius.

"Oh! I know," replied Lance.

"But if you tell *me*," rejoined Gabriel, "perhaps I can tell you where it is."

"No, you can't," answered the hopeful boy, still boring his head into every nook and corner, and displacing half the articles ranged round the shop.

Mr. Widge, senior, desisted from the conversation during some minutes, as unconsciously feeling it was hopeless to carry it further; and yet, at the end of that time, he renewed it with the following query:

"Why don't you say what it is you want? How can you be so tiresome?"

"I ain't tiresome," answered Lance, "if people arn't tiresome with me. I know what I want, and that's enough."

To be sure Master Widge colored somewhat as he said this, as though he felt partly conscious of his impertinence; but then he did say it, and Gabriel sagaciously allowed it all to pass by in silence, and on the usual consideration that genius is always high-spirited, and impatient of any kind of restraint or control.

Unable to meet with what he wanted in the shop, Launcelot skipped up-stairs, and commenced a general rummage and ransack of the upper stories, until, by great good luck, and much to his delight, he turned up exactly the thing.

It was a piece of fine, smooth, white wood, which Mr. Widge, senior, once had had manufactured into its present shape, under the temporary impression that it would make a handsome top for a small table, but he had subsequently abandoned the design. With this prize under his arm, Launcelot rapidly descended into the kitchen again, and having first satisfied himself that the poker had not been molested, sat down on a chair, and rearing the aforesaid piece of wood upon his knees and against the wall, proceeded to draw upon it a large head of an old man in a wig, which he made nearly as ample as a whole sheep-skin. Having done this to his satisfaction, he fixed it securely up, and taking that delightful pencil, the poker, from the fire proceeded to shade it as well as he could, by scorching the surface into either lighter or darker shadows, by the ingenious process of holding the hot end of the poker at various distances from the board. Polly thought he would set the house on fire and especially as she could not imagine what other end he could have in view; while Launcelot himself threatened strongly to burn the end of her nose with his red-hot pencil, if she dared to look over him till he had about concluded. He vowed it was impossible for any one to study properly, and have his mind sufficiently upon it, if people were staring at him all the while and watching how he got on. Silence was the most important and the principal ingredient of study and especially of such study as drew largely upon the inventive faculties and the perceptive qualities of the mind.

By the time that darkness fell, Launce had nearly completed his picture, and that so much to his own satisfaction, considering it a first effort, that he felt as any great

man might feel (upon the achievement of as great a victory. Glory seemed tingle through his very finger-ends; and in imagination he beheld himself travelling down the long passage of immortality, a sort of giant amongst nations of little boys.

With delight he flew to acquaint his father that he had something fresh to show him, like what he had never seen before.

"That's right—go it, Lancy—stick to it, my boy!" replied Gabriel, as he followed his clever fellow into the drawing-room, whither the poker-drawing had been transferred by the artist as being of too much value to be allowed to remain elsewhere.

If ever a man in this world was struck dumb with amazement and admiration, Gabriel Widge was so stricken on beholding this extraordinary specimen of his sons' powers; and all done, too, with nothing but the kitchen poker!

"Grand!" exclaimed the happy father: "famous, Lancy! Go it again, and you'll make yourself immortal in no time. I'll send one of these to the Royal Academy, next year, and astonish the natives a bit there—blame my wig if I don't!"

Mr. Widge further desired to be informed by what means Launcelot had got hold of the invention; to which the latter replied by giving his father, to understand it was purely an invention of his own.

"Your own!" cried Gabriel; "your own!—you don't say so? Give us your hand. I foresee you'll be as famous for what one may call this popo-tinto, as Prince Rupert is for mezzotinto. But how did you get the hint, my boy?—you must have had the hint from something or other."

"I saw a tailor scorch his board with a hot goose," replied Launcelot, with all the simplicity and unaffectedness of unconscious genius.

"Why, *did* you, indeed!—indeed!" exclaimed Gabriel; "why, that is equal to Prince Rupert, who took *his* hint from a soldier's scraping his rusty fusil. Bless my soul!"

And Mr. Widge relapsed into another fit of silent admiration.

Not to prolong this scene, we shall merely observe that the effect produced by Launcelot's poker-triumphs was so great that he was encouraged to scorch and disfigure nearly every adaptable surface of wood in the house. The kitchen bellows was ornamented with a ferocious tiger's head; the top of the dresser bore a rude delineation of Jupiter with the hand of Holofernes, although most visitors mistook it for a portrait of Polly serving up a pudd-

ing. In fact, poker drawings poked themselves into notice at every turn; while many were the frights, and burnings, and blisters, endured by the servant during the respective processes of their production.

How far this warm course of study might eventually have been carried, is more than the historian hereof could tell, had not an event at length occurred, which put a stop to it almost as suddenly as it had begun, though certainly under peculiar circumstances by no means so promising and auspicious.

Such was the delight of Mr. Gabriel Widge, senior, with the abilities of his son Launcelot in this (as he supposed) new discovery in the fine arts, that, eventually nothing less would satisfy him than having his own portrait taken at full length by his son, and finished in the finest style, and with the most delicate poker imaginable. Gabriel himself forged several additional irons for the purpose, and borrowed some others from one of his neighbors, a plumber by trade, in the hope that Launce would find them useful.

A large piece of white deal, bigger than would have made a door, was had in readiness, and at length the eventful day for the first sitting arrived. Mr. Widge, senior, felt absolutely grand as he took his seat and threw himself into a strange uncouth posture, intended for a fine attitude. So pleased was he, indeed, that it was with the greatest difficulty he could prevent the muscles of his face from extending themselves into a broad smile of irrepressible conscious satisfaction.

"Keep face straight, pa," said Lance, looking very earnestly at him.

"Can't, my boy!" answered Gabriel; "drabbin my jacket if I can. I'm so uncommon pleased!" and then Gabriel laughed outright. Thereupon Lance laughed also, Mrs. Widge smiled, and Polly simpered.

By the time that the drawing of the figure was concluded, Launcelot had many irons in the fire, in order to burn it in; while Mr. Widge, senior, had dropped off to sleep with his finger beside his nose, which he repeatedly and with mechanical regularity pushed aside like a flexible spring, as his head sank downwards and his hand gave a sudden jerk, but to be raised again to the same place for the sole purpose, apparently, of repeating the same pleasing experiment.

Launcelot aroused him once or twice to a just sense of his duty as a sitter, and received from his father various apologies for his drowsiness; yet, scarcely had they escaped

his lips, before he again relapsed into the same state of half-conscious torpor. The future baronet, Sir Launcelot, hereupon grew vexed, as all geniuses are entitled to do whenever they please; and therefore, in order the more effectually to keep his father awake and lively, ingeniously approached him with a hot plumbing iron, applied within so nicely judged a distance of his nose, that by an accurate calculation it might gradually warm, and glow, and burn, and perhaps even become well-nigh "done," ere from the nature of the process, he should wake to find it out.

Although Mr. Widge was by this time in a very sound and deep slumber, he instinctively rubbed the end of his nose once or twice, with a peculiarity of action that highly delighted Launcelot, and at once satisfied him how much more fun there was in singeing noses than in making poker-drawings. On these occasions the hopeful youth dexterously withdrew his hot iron, lest his loving parent should happen to touch it with his finger and awake.

At last Gabriel's proboscis, which was not in some respects, unlike, at its extremity, the shell of a walnut, began to appear remarkably bright and brilliant. It looked in fact, as though it were under the especial and tutelary care of St. Anthony himself; and as the gentleman, whose appendage it was, began to exhibit signs of awaking, Launcelot hastily poked his iron between the bars, and sat down before his deal board, as though contemplating the picture, and patiently the end of his father's nap.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Widge, senior; "I'm afraid I've been to sleep again."

Launcelot peeped beyond the edge of his board, and smiled affirmatively. At the same instant he observed both his father's eyes directed in an oblique manner downwards, and full upon the end of his nose, which now looked remarkably like the red side of a roasting apple just before it cracks.

"Lance!" he exclaimed in a tone of deep consternation; "do you see any thing amiss with my nose?"

Launcelot could scarcely refrain from laughing, but he hid his head behind the poker-drawing, and managed, apparently, to preserve his gravity.

"Have you done anything at it?" fiercely demanded Gabriel; a suspicion of something wrong crossing his mind. And he turned upon his son a pair of eyes much more expressive than Launcelot ever before remembered to have seen in the same sagacious head.

"Did you do it?" roared the enraged parent.

Launcelot felt himself in a predicament: i. e., either he must tell a lie or tell the truth; both of which are sometimes remarkably inconvenient. But tell one or the other he must.

Whereupon, after considerable hesitation and evasion, Master Launcelot confessed, that it might be owing to a kind of slip of the poker that had occurred when he went rather too close to his father with it red hot in his hand.

"Od rabbit your jacket!" exclaimed Mr. Widge, "I've as good a mind to rub you down with a hard brush as ever I had in my life. That's your genius, is it? to singe your father's nose like a goose. But I'll teach you better manners, my boy, that I warrant you. Now just listen to what I say. Take them irons out of the fire, carry 'em down into the cellar, put that board in the back-yard, and never let me see you touch any thing of this sort again!"

This fearful sentence was uttered in such a commanding tone of voice, that Master Launcelot almost began to cry; but finding his father in earnest, and knowing from experience that when he determined upon a thing he would be obeyed, he began very slowly to execute his commands. For although in general Lancy was in the habit of treating him almost as he pleased with perfect impunity, yet on particular occasions, of which this was decidedly one, he no more dared to oppose him than if he had been verily the king of St. Martin's Lane. Mr. Widge himself retired to rest that night, happy in having been delivered of certain miserable fears which had attacked him touching his nose, and glad to find that neither medicine nor application was required to remove the complaint in it beyond what was comprised in a twist of strong brown paper dipped in vinegar which was screwed upon it in the form of a small conical sugar-loaf.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

LAUNCELOT'S INTRODUCTION TO MR. GRIESBACK, WITH CERTAIN HOSTILITIES WHICH BROKE OUT BETWEEN HIM AND MR. SANDY WYLIE.

HAD not Mr. Widge senior very wisely fallen back upon his old hopes and anticipations touching the genius of his son Laun-

celot, the consequences might have been so serious as to have obliged us, much against our will, to stop suddenly short in this our history, and throw away the pen, hopeless of further matter sufficiently agreeable to induce us to record it. Happily, however, for the reader as well as for us, Gabriel reflected after a few days, that a man could scarcely do a more ridiculous and foolish thing than suddenly to cut off the pipe, as it were, down which the thawing abilities of his boy were just beginning to drop and dribble. He took secret blame and dudgeon, to himself for having suffered his temper to get the better of his judgment, as he had done on the great occasion recorded in the last chapter, and denounced himself as an ass and a dunderhead (for he did not spare his epithets), because in a hot moment he had so literally, according to the old saying, allowed himself to be "led by his nose" at a time when a judicious man would, on the contrary, have withdrawn that feature precipitately from the scene of its disasters. He therefore made up in his own mind the best account and apology he could for the natural oddities of genius; he called to recollection that all clever men had been marked by such eccentricities in their youth, as plainly demonstrated they were very dissimilar to other people; and, after he had considered the matter over in the best, calmest, and most philosophical manner of which he was capable, Mr. Widge could not tell really why the roasting of his own father's nose by a talented boy of sixteen, should not of itself constitute one of those characteristic traits, which, however painful to the subject of it, would one day be told for the amusement of after-generations.

Under the influence of these feelings, then, Mr. Widge one day addressed Master Launcelot as follows—

"Lancy, my boy—Lancy! I'm going to put you to Mr. Griesback's, Lancy."

"Mr. Griesback's, pa!" repeated Lancy.

"Mr. Griesback's," answered Gabriel, "the greatest instructor for young geniuses that ever was known."

"Oh, law! Pa, I'm so sorry I hurt your nose with the poker, you can't think."

"That's right, my boy, that's right," answered Gabriel, "you should always repent of your sins, and then you will be forgiven."

The very next day, Mr. Widge and Launcelot jogged off together, well pleased, to the establishment of Mr. Griesback; Mr. W. with a poker drawing under his arm made on the top of a round table, and his son carrying, like a slave, an enormous load of equally clever things on paper, tied carefully up in a new portfolio which the happy

father had ordered especially for the occasion.

"Here we are, Lancy," Mr. Widge rapturously exclaimed, as he arrived before the door of a house in — street, over the portico of which was placed a colossal bust of Minerva. "Here we are, my boy; look at that great head up there. That's Minerva, the goddess of the liberal arts; she never had no mother—was born out of Jupiter's brain when Vulcan split his skull open at his own particular desire, and moreover, was as big at the very first as she is now, and ready armed when she was born."

Some few days afterwards Master Launcelot was removed, with an immense stock of clothes and other requisites, from the residence of his father in St. Martin's Lane to that of Mr. Griesback in — street. But Mr. Widge, senior, did not part with his son without laying a very strict injunction upon him to stick to his studies night and day, with the vision of A. R. A., R. A., P. R. A., and a baronetcy, continually before his eyes. But in the meantime, and ere those respective steps of honor were obtained, he desired to hear from him by letter, touching the progress he made, as also to see him to dine at the round family table in St. Martin's Lane, on the first Sunday in every month.

Mr. Griesback's first essay with his new pupil consisted in fitting him out with all the apparatus necessary for the successful achievement of the miracles he was now finally destined to perform. Nay, Mr. Griesback went further than that, and even overloaded him; for it was a maxim of his as applied to all transactions between himself and his pupils, that they could never have too much of a good thing when they paid for it. Accordingly, he provided him with a thin deal board, value one and sixpence, for six shillings and sixpence; two or three sheets of drawing paper at two pence-halfpenny, for four pence each; and pencils at a shilling a piece that were made for three pence.

Thus equipped, and as proud as any military hero when marching out to certain and glorious victory, Launcelot was conducted by his new master to the field of his intended exploits. This was a room reached by a flight of stairs, which, in less heroic times, had been devoted to the base purposes of a hay loft, but now was beautifully white-washed, lit only from the centre of the ceiling by a dome-like skylight, and amply furnished with abundance of plaster casts from the antique of all sizes, and of every shade of color, from pure white to deep leather-like brown. On the left hand of

the entrance door a skeleton dangled from the ceiling by a cord, which ran through a pulley at the top, and was affixed at the other end to a ring and screw, comfortably bored into the bone on the top of the head.

On the walls in various places were suspended cards, on which were written various appropriate apothegms from Aristotle, besides several repetitions of the words, "*Silence is indispensable in a place devoted to study.*"

Around the room some ten or twenty artists of various ages, from fourteen to twice that number of years, were employed in their labors—some drawing from the casts, some from the aforesaid skeleton, some from large human figures in outline, and others again making clay models.

Launcelot had never seen a skeleton before (and indeed did not know for certain until now whether his body was not solid meat all through), so that he felt rather awe-struck on beholding this grim relic of humanity—this bare foundation of what once had been a laughing and crying creature, suspended so familiarly close to him.

On entering, each of the aforesaid students severally and respectively raised his eyes to look at the new recruit who had come to join their ranks—an inspection which had well nigh put Master Launcelot altogether out of countenance. But what foiled him most was a small pellet of squeezed bread, about the size of an ordinary pill, that some mischievous student behind him had evidently projected out of the end of a hollow bamboo, and which, whether intentionally or not, hit him a smart fillip on the tip of his proboscis. The blow made his eyes water, though he took it in silence, while a suppressed smile gleamed on the faces of all who chanced to behold the experiment.

"Silence, gentlemen, if you please!" said Mr. Griesback, as he cast his eye around, and conducted his new pupil to the first convenient vacant seat that it fell upon. Here he taught him to pin his paper on the board; set before him several paltry diagrams which were first to be accurately copied in straight lines, and then converted by a curve or two into foxes' heads, human eyes, or such other figures as partook of a triangular character. Above all, he laid upon him a very strict injunction against the use or introduction of India rubber, but recommended instead, a stale penny loaf. This might be termed Mr. Griesback's first lesson, as he shortly afterwards quitted the "studio," and did not make his appearance again that day, except once in the afternoon, just to look at him.

As it is no part of our purpose to give in detail the progressive movements by which Master Launcelot achieved his education as an artist, we shall content ourselves simply by observing that in the course of a few weeks from the time of his introduction, he found himself most entirely at home amongst his fellow-students; and, behind Mr. Griesback's back, effectuated some of the finest practical jokes that had ever been put on record there, and which were well calculated to transmit his name, if no further, at least to the next succession of Griesbackian candidates for artistic immortality.

In this academy he remained until he began to verge very closely upon manhood, giving great satisfaction to his father all the while, but still greater to Mr. Griesback. Mr. Gabriel Widge was almost every Sunday astonished and delighted with some new production of his son's genius; and Mr. Griesback once a quarter equally as charmed when Gabriel lugged out his heavy purse and handed over to his son's instructor, with the greatest good will in the world, three months pay, at the rate of one hundred and sixty guineas per annum, in advance.

Launcelot had attained the age of nineteen years, when an adventure happened which might eventually have cost him his life, and forever deprived the world of the shining light of his genius, had not good fortune kindly stepped between and thrown her shield over the hero of St. Martin's-lane.

Amongst the pupils was a tall, raw Scotchman, fresh from the Highlands, who had shown some native talent when on the mountains, and had been sent to London to improve it, through the generosity of the "laird" of the district in which he resided.

Sandy was a pupil of longer standing than Lance, and therefore had advanced further in his studies. We shall, accordingly, not be surprised to find him employing himself in making a drawing—or rather in trying to make one—of the grim, old skeleton before alluded to. After a day's devoted attention to it, he turned out such a deplorable bad job, that young Widge undertook the correction of him, and suggested that he had not made his skeleton half thin enough, as it was the remains of a Spitalfield weaver who had been starved to death in a cellar, after having petitioned the Queen Dowager for assistance, and therefore the bones were very much run up, as it was natural to suppose they would be; whereas he, the said Sandy, had represented a skeleton fit for an alderman at least,

if not indeed for Daniel Lambert himself, as represented on the sign in Ludgate Hill.

Mr. Wylie grew savage as the youngsters around began to laugh, but as yet he said nothing, and only rubbed away at his outlines with the sag end of a bread-crust which he had borrowed of a neighbor. The dusk of evening was now beginning to draw somewhat deeply down, and Mr. Wylie labored hardly to conclude his work before leaving for the night; but while he was gazing with intense earnestness upon his model, it suddenly, and to his utter astonishment, began to move. The jaws opened and shut, and rattled the few old teeth together that still remained in them most fearfully, while the arms and legs shot out and sprawled in the air like the limbs of some prodigious deformity of a spider; or, as though the bones and wire were about to perform a Highland reel for the especial amusement of him who sat before it, and was "far from the land" of his birth.

More from the unexpectedness of this "dance of death" than from actual fear, Mr. Wylie started abruptly from his seat, stumbled over the two square boxes which formed it, and fell heavily against his next door neighbor, a slim, ailing, consumptive, and slightly-distorted, but hot-blooded youth from Lancashire, whose easel and utensils he carried along with him to the ground.

Mettle was now opposed to mettle in good earnest; for the last named individual no sooner saw his materials thus flying away from before him, than with a loud exclamation of "Ay, dear!" and an oath which consigned the Scotchman to very uncomfortable quarters, he snatched up a canvass that happened to be lying close beside him, and aimed a blow with it at Sandy's scone with such force and admirable precision, as to protrude his head clean through it, and deposit the stretcher on his shoulders.

A roar of laughter followed upon the evident success of this new method of framing a head, intermingled with various professional exclamations touching the spirit, originality, and remarkable liveliness of expression which it displayed; and so in truth it did, for as one student pulled the frame a little on one side, and another repeated the same experiment on the other, in order, as the plea was, to catch a glimpse of him in the best light, poor Wylie grinned, ground his teeth, and almost drew blood by biting his lips from mere exasperation. Soon, however, he recovered his legs, and having also succeeded in disengaging himself from the canvass and stretch-

er, he looked wildly round for the sole revengeful purpose of selecting out, if possible, the first and greatest offender.

At that instant, as ill-luck would have it, Master Launcelot Widge, his old enemy, who, in reality, was at the bottom of all this, and had been wire-puller in ordinary to the skeleton during Sandy's fright, chanced to be so desperately tickled with the triumphant success of the trick, that, after a great variety of unsuccessful efforts, and in spite of all the philosophy he could bring to bear upon the occasion, he suddenly produced a kind of explosion of laughter, loud, deep and irresistible. Had it not been for this, Lancy would have escaped for the present unobserved, but no sooner did the sound betray his peculiar locality behind the skeleton, than Mr. Wylie rushed furiously upon him, and at one blow of the fist, supported as it was by the weight of nearly his whole body, well nigh demolished for ever some of the peculiar beauties and most winning graces of Master Launcelot's countenance and knocked him against the wall. Here, however, was but one enemy conquered, and the true Highland blood, when well up, is never satisfied, metaphorically speaking, with one scalp. Accordingly, as a wild boar turns round upon his hunters in a thicket, and uncertain who to attack in particular, makes a desperate rush amongst the whole of them—so did Mr. Wylie turn round and vent his rage in a wild and indiscriminate attack upon whoever came across his course. They, however, were, it is almost needless to say, as few as possible, since all who could, wisely got out of his way, and allowed him, without regret, to "waste his sweetness on the desert air".

It is scarcely to be supposed that any man hitting right and left in the midst of such an arena as Mr. Griesback's studio, could fail to strike something or other, either living or inanimate; much less can it be believed that so fiery a gentleman as was Mr. Wylie should lack success where the objects around him were—like the miscellaneous effects of an auctioneer—"too numerous to mention."

In the ordinary course of things, then, he very soon brought his fist into violent contact, amongst other articles, with the pedestal which supported Mr. Griesback's best plaster cast, the Apollo Belvidere. This being made of wood, proved rather harder than the fist that struck it, and hence—although quite unknown to Sandy until sometime afterwards when his passion had cooled—at one simple and rapid operation, laid his knuckles bare to the heads of the

metacarpal bones. How long he might have swept his boney scythes across the field it is impossible to say, had not Jupiter himself, as in the wars of Troy, providentially stood between to arrest and conclude the matter. In other words, Mr. Wylie's next and last blow chanced to alight upon the temples of the Jupiter Phidias which the barbarian utterly demolished at one blow. But the instant poor Sandy saw the pieces scattered upon the ground, they operated upon him with the suddenness and power of a magic spell—the horrid truth instantly flashed across his brain "that it would tak' a muckle purse o' siller" to re-embody Jupiter, and the thought acted upon his passion like oil upon the waves; or to speak more modernly poetically, "let him down quite easy." He stood stock still for a few moments, with his eyes fixed upon the fragments, and expressive of scarcely less horror than if he had committed murder. In the next instant he was seized by a powerful and very cogent impulse to "be off," and accordingly seized his hat from off the peg on which it hung, and rushed desperately out of the place.

The next first care was to see how matters fared with Master Launcelot. He still lay upon the floor exactly as Mr. Wylie had thrown him, and on being examined, presented a most wo-begone and melancholy spectacle, a sad contrast indeed to that offered to the spirited mountaineer.

Presuming that he ever had any sense, there he now lay utterly deprived of it. Both his eyes which appeared to have been particularly selected by Mr. Wylie as a sort of "bulls eye" to aim at, exhibited an amazingly strong resemblance to a brace of small paste dumplings—at least in form, though not in monotony of color; for, nearly all the shades of the prism were depicted with a degree of precision which, in his cooler moments, all the artistical skill of the self-same artist who had "done" these, could never have equalled; while a small but rapid rill of a brilliant red color gushed from beneath that jutting point, his nose, meandering curiously across the barren waste of his beardless chin, and through the avalanche of bright white, composed by a very stiff "front" that extended all the way down from his throat to his waistband.

Somewhat alarmed at their companion's condition, and fearful also of the visitation Mr. Griesback upon them in case he should sift the affair out, the students employed themselves in the best way their knowledge suggested to patch Master Widge up again; and to that end they despatched a

little sag of the school for a pennyworth of butter, which was rubbed into his head to soften and mollify it, and half-a-pound of raw beef to clap by way of plaster upon his eyes.

Poor Lance was incapable of seeing for himself in consequence of the openings of his lids being reduced to mere slits; but on being fully assured and satisfied that his formidable antagonist had fairly abandoned the field and fled, he gave evidence of amazing courage and determination, quite wonderful in one of his years. His warlike disposition displayed itself at every point; and so desperate and deadly were his threats of vengeance, that several of his hearers who were younger than himself, positively trembled in their shoes at the bare notion of the thing. Others, on the contrary, who saw a little way beyond their nose ends, and felt convinced that he was a rank coward at bottom, encouraged him in his valorous denunciations merely for their own amusement. They assured him of their entire concurrence in every sentiment he expressed; declared that his feeling was precisely what that of a gentleman's son should be; applauded his sense of honor as highly creditable at once to the name of Widge and to the school, and vowed that to a man they would back him in any regular pitched battle that he might think proper to fight with Sandy.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

IN WHICH LAUNCELOT VERY INGENUOUSLY
SCRAPES OUT OF A DUEL, WITH ALL THE
HONOR OF HAVING—FOUGHT ONE.

As a matter of course, much interest was exhibited by all parties at the studio, on the following morning, to know what might be the result of the next meeting between Mr. Launcelot Widge and Sandy Wylie.

About nine o'clock Sandy walked into the room, with a strong feeling of innate bravery shining through a skulking and crest-fallen exterior, and looking as though in his forlorn and hopeless desperation, he was prepared either to melt, or to harden into adamant, as the circumstances of the next ten minutes might chance to require. Half an hour elapsed in dead silence, but no Launcelot came to demand the reparation so much talked about on the previous evening. At length the sound of footsteps

was heard ascending the stairs, and all eyes were upon the doorway in expectation of beholding the entrance of Mr. Widge. Instead, however, Mr. Griesback himself walked in, looking more serious, not to say more ferocious, than ever before he had been known to look within the recollection of the oldest pupil in the establishment. Having placed himself in a position which brought his head into immediate contiguity with the breast-bone of the skeletons that dangled at his back, he folded his arms leisurely, and throwing himself into the attitude usually given to the statutes of Napoleon, proceeded to institute a legislative inquiry into the disorders and riots of the preceding evening; during which he readily expressed his great and extreme surprise that an assemblage of young gentlemen like themselves, whose very professions were the arts of peace, could so far have forgotten their stations as to have engaged in a personal encounter, disgraceful even to the inhabitants of Seven Dials, and which he felt ashamed and sorry to find had terminated in so disastrous a manner to one of his most highly esteemed and valuable pupils.

Many faces looked remarkably grave during this discourse, and the most intense industry and alacrity were involuntarily displayed by the students over their respective works. Mr. Wylie alone exhibited an extra-red countenance, as though he had been exposed for a week past to the north blast on the top of Ben Lomond.

"I've done nae wrong," said Wylie, "and would na apologizee to the king his-self."

"Then I must beg, sir," replied Griesback, with all the dignity he could assume, "I must beg, sir, that you will quit this place to-day, and for the last time."

"Nae doubt, Mr. Graseback," answered Wylie, "it wad suit vary weel for me to leave in the middle o' a quarter that's paid for aforehand; but there's always twa to a bargain, mon, and so I'll e'en mak' choice to stay my time oot, and ha'e my penn'orth for my penny."

This characteristic trait of the "bonny braw John Highlandman's" character, set the whole school in a roar of laughter, in which Mr. Griesback himself experienced considerable difficulty to avoid joining.

The latter-named gentleman, however, by no means relished the position in which he stood, for he was now almost compelled, in self-defence, to be generous against his will. Still, resolved to carry his point, Mr. Griesback instantly replied to Wylie's last observation, by stating that it would give

him much pleasure to return him all his money, in case he would so far oblige him as to quit the study altogether.

"Weel, that's a reasonable offer, Mr. Greasback," answered Sandy; "and as the quaster has but a month or mir to run, I'll e'en tak' it."

And, so saying, he rose from his seat, collected his drawings, tucked his drawing-board under his arm, quietly bade the students a "gude mornin'," and having received back his money from Mr. Griesback, walked, for the last time, out of the house.

Never was a terrified and trembling wretch more heartily pleased at his deliverance from the cause of all his terrors, than was Master Launcelot Widge that morning, when Mr. Griesback went to his private chamber (for there Launce had expressed his determination to confine himself until his eyes were well again), and in few words informed him that he had finally expelled Mr. Wylie from the premises. Launce, however, endeavored to hide his joy under a feigned expression of regret that Mr. Griesback had not allowed him to remain until his own recovery, in order that he might have had an opportunity of chastising the fellow as he deserved. Griesback replied by requesting him to moderate his courage, to recollect himself, to consider for what great things his father destined him, and then to think whether it was not more in accordance with his own dignity to rest content with the matter as it at present stood. This advice Launce took with unexampled docility and kindness, and at last even went so far as to say that he thought he might venture out of his room rather earlier than he previously intended, as he felt his eyes considerably improved within the last hour or two.

About a month after this, in company with his father, his mother, and two young ladies (the daughters of a wealthy pawnbroker of Mr. Widge's acquaintance), named Chuckchin, our hero, one evening, marched proudly into one of the front boxes of Drury Lane theatre, shortly after the first act of the play was over, and while many of the spectators were relieving themselves by promenading the slips. Having ascertained that, with one exception, there was room for the whole party, Launce seated his four friends, and then looked out for a convenient anchorage for himself. On the second seat of the next box he espied an unoccupied place, and as the curtain drew up and the play proceeded without its previous occupant re-appearing, Launcelot thought proper to enter and claim it as his own. Scarcely had he sat there ten min-

utes ere the box-door was opened, and the voice of the Scotchman behind him demanded the place which he occupied to be given up. Our hero had no occasion to look round, for he felt assured that it was the voice of that accursed Sandy. Nor was he mistaken: Mr. Wylie had been presented by a countryman of his, the sub-editor of an evening paper, with an order for the night, and accordingly had made his appearance in a place where he never could have reached but for some lucky circumstance. Launce absolutely shook with fear, when he found himself placed in so awkward a predicament; for although he would instantly have given up to any one else, he could not make up his mind, notwithstanding it was strongly supported by his cowardice, to yield it up to Mr. Wylie. The mountaineer, however, persisted, and the more especially when he discovered who the invader and usurper really was. And furthermore he also publicly inquired of Launce whether he had perfectly recovered of his black eyes; and remarked, additionally, that if Mr. Widge entertained any particular desire for another pair, similarly ornamented, he had only to persist in keeping his seat. Launce knew that the eyes of his father, his mother, and of the two Misses Chuckchin, were on him, as well as those of nearly all the audience within hearing of the quarrel; and he knew also, that their ears must have heard the insolent observations last addressed to him by Sandy. It was positively necessary that he should act with some show and smack of courage, in order to save his credit, at the same time that he should so do it as to avoid any disturbance in the theatre. The Misses Chuckchin all this time had expressed the deepest solicitude that he would take any other place; under plea of complying with which request, Mr. Launcelot slowly rose to get out, but as he passed Mr. Wylie, he presented him, with a trembling hand and very ghastly-looking features, a large card, on which was written "Mr. Launcelot Widge," at the same time stuttering with agitation the portentous words, "You shall hear from me again."

"I dinna carry ane o' these things," said Sandy, as he turned the card over and over in his fingers, "but ye know wha I am, an' I sall be maist happy to receive your message." And so saying, he took his seat.

Although Mr. Widge, junior, was soon accommodated with another place, he could not bring himself to attach any interest to the performances; and eventually he became so remarkably sick and faint with the thoughts of what he had done, as well as

of that which yet remained for him to do, that he was obliged to leave before nine o'clock; although he assured his friends that it was in consequence of nothing but the heat, and the horrid smell of some bad powder, that had been let off behind the scenes to produce lightning on the stage. Accordingly the whole party walked off again, Mr. and Mrs. Widge taking the precedence, while Launcelot, with a Miss Chuckchin on each arm, followed, after the ordinary manner of lovers, behind.

The supper table was already laid in the front second floor-room,—dignified by the title of drawing-room—when the party arrived at Mr. Gabriel Widge's house in St. Martin's Lane.

Scarcely was the party placed at table, ere Miss Amelia Chuckchin, who sat to the right of Launcelot, remarked, in a tone of deep indignation, what a vulgar and insolent fellow that was who had insulted him so grossly in the theatre; an observation which was supported on the left by her sister, Miss Josephine, who further hoped that Mr. Widge would not condescend to notice the low creature any more, but treat him with that silent contempt which he so well deserved.

"Drat my jacket, Lancy!" exclaimed Gabriel, "you shall pull him up at Bow street, and give him a lick of a different oil to that he tasted to-night."

To which Lancy replied, that, with all deference to his father, he should scorn to appeal to the bench of magistrates so long as he possessed within himself the power of demanding that satisfaction which was due to a gentleman.

"Why, what do you mean?" demanded Gabriel, in a consternation, his knife and fork dropping from his hands, and fixing his eyes in terror on his son; "you can't be so rash now," he continued, "as to do and think of that fool's way of settling a dispute?—You go and fight a dewel!"

"Oh, law!" exclaimed each of the ladies at the table, as they respectively followed Gabriel's example with the knife and fork, and gazed with a mingled expression of affection and affright in Launcelot's face.

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Launcelot!" said Miss Amelia, "let us beg of you never to think of such a thing."

"Oh, no—certainly not," added Miss Josephine.

"Never let me hear you've such nonsense as that in your head," said Mrs. Widge, firmly; eat your supper;—he does not mean to do any thing of the sort."

"Let him speak for himself," remarked

Gabriel, "do you really mean to do any thing of that silly kind?"

Lance cut away with savage determination at his meat, while all eyes present were fixed with the most intense interest and expectancy upon him, awaiting that answer which might make them happy or miserable for life. It was indeed a moment of awful suspense. At length he spoke.

"What I mean is this:—that either his brains or mine shall see day-light, afore daylight comes, the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, oh!" half shrieked the Misses Chuckchin, and sunk back in their chairs. Mrs. Widge declared he should not stir out of the house so long as she was in it; while Gabriel rose from his seat, and crossing to the other side of the table, seized his son by the coat collar.

"I'll tell you what, Lancy, my boy," said he, "no man admires your courage more than I do, but if you persist in this ridiculous, silly, and stupid determination, to run the risk of throwing away your valuable life, like pearls afore swine, I'll send for th' police, and clap you under arrest this very minute!"

"That you can do, father, as soon as you please," replied Lance, if you'll just be kind enough to let me have my supper first: though at the same time I can assure you, that unless I was at once imprisoned for life, no police on earth would prevent me doing what I think proper."

"Then there's no consideration for me, nor your mother, nor any body else, about it! We're nowhere, nor nobody. Ivery thing is forgot and to be thrown aside just to gratify such a wild, mad passion as this! All my hopes of seeing a bar'net made of you, and ivery thing that has been laid out in your education, must be blasted on one pop of a pistol. It's awful, Lancy, awful!"

"Shocking, indeed!" added his mother, "I'm sure I could not have thought it possible such horrid notions could ever have got into his head."

"But it is a point of honor, ma'am, besides," protested Miss Josephine.

"Point of fiddlestick!" answered Mrs. Widge, "talk of honor!—such nonsense. I don't see any honor in two men, that ought to know better, running the risk of murdering each other for the paltriest trifle of a quarrel that two children would not thump one other over. It's all flummery, Miss Jossey, and Lance shan't talk about it."

"Well," demanded Gabriel, still keeping hold his son's collar, in order to prevent him from running away there, and then to blow the Scotchman's brains out,

"you mean to persist in this, or do you not, because I can't hold you here all night."

"If I'm at liberty, I'll either shoot him, or he shall shoot me," very firmly replied Launcelot; who now found himself perfectly safe in repeating these threats, and felt, indeed, that the only way now left to him to avoid a meeting with Sandy, which he positively dreaded, that was to get himself apprehended previously, under color of preventing a contemplated breach of the public peace.

"Then the thing is settled," observed his father, on hearing the last observation. "I'll have two officers in directly." And in spite of his wife's protestations to the contrary, and her asseverations that herself and the Misses Chuckchin could eventually manage him, Mr. Widge hurried out of the room, locked the door upon them in order to prevent Launcelot's escape before his return, placed the key in his pocket, and hastened off for the required assistance.

No long time elapsed before his return, but that brief period was made the most of by the three ladies, who exerted all their skill to cool down his high and injured spirit. Lance had just declared most obstinately his determination not to yield to any of their entreaties, when his father re-entered the room, followed by an officer of the law.

"That's him!" said Gabriel to the constable, "and I charge you to take care on him. Be cautious he does you no mischief and gets away."

"No fear o' that," replied the officer, smiling, and advancing towards Launcelot, who now turned unusually white.

"So I understand, sir," said he, addressing the latter, "that a breach of the public peace is contemplated. You must know these things is wrong, and forbid by the law. Now be persuaded to promise me and your distressed family here, that you will not do any thing of the sort, and you will save yourself, and all on us, a deal of futur' trouble. It's no use now, remember, for no dewel can take place while we know the parties. If you persist, we shall only have to pull you up afore the magistrate to-morrow and bind both of you over to keep the peace; but if you'll promise on your honor as a gentleman to your father and mother not to tak' another step in the matter, we'll let it rest where it is, and you'll avoid the unpleasantness of having the thing made public."

This reasoning seemed positively irresistible in the eyes of every body, save the individual to whom it was addressed; but

most perversely he still held out, for in fact—though nobody but himself suspected it—he very particularly desired to be "bound to keep the peace" according to law, as it would afford him every excuse in the world for avoiding what he so much wished to avoid, any further interview with Sandy, and at the same time maintain his reputation for courage,—which would appear so desperate as to require the intervention of friends and the law in order to keep it bottled down.

Finding all efforts to cool him or turn his determination vain, the limb of the law left him in the care of his father for that night—a sad and sleepless one to the Widges and Chuckchins—and on the morrow, Master Launcelot and Sandy Wiley were summoned to the police-office, where each was bound in strong securities to keep the peace towards each other, and all else of his majesty's subjects for the space of twelve months. And thus happily, by our hero's own management, not only was his reputation saved, but a very harmless termination was put to a quarrel, which at one period wore a most bloody and portentous aspect.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

THE PAWN-BROKER'S SHOP—THE PURCHASE OF THE MINIATURE, AND A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE TO WHICH IT LED—MRS. VOGLE'S INTERVIEW WITH A STRANGE STRANGER.

If ever the reader in his progress along the streets, has suddenly stopped short to take a momentary glance across the miscellaneous articles which usually adorn a pawnbroker's window—and few indeed are they, who have not, at one time or another so far committed themselves—he must have observed a small collection of pale, washy and faded miniatures, set in gold, and suspended upon a wire stretched across the panes. Did ever these "pledges" of affection now dead, these memorials of former abundance, now reduced to poverty and pawning, suggest to him a passing thought upon the instability of even the most lasting of human passions, and the mutability of the most promising of human affairs? Perhaps that brisk-looking young fellow in the Prussian-blue coat with his hair brushed up at the sides (the wrong way of the nap,) was a successful assistant to some first-rate city linen draper, and in the full confidence

of never being worse provided than he was; then, had that identical portrait painted "in this style two guineas," and then mounted thus in gold to present to the mistress, who afterwards became his wife when he commenced in business for himself. Possibly he spent a considerable portion of his savings in a "spicy front," and in bills about immense reductions and small profits, and tremendous sacrifices; and very likely while all this was doing below, his young wife sat proudly in the drawing room, decked in all the glories of the draper's shop, and dreaming day and night how people must admire her, and how she and her husband should but succeed, as soon as the shop had had time to be established. But, possibly also, before that happy establishment of the shop had arrived, some distrustful creditor of its owner suddenly stopped his career, and within a week afterwards the shutters were up and plastered over with bills of "bankrupt's stock" to be sold at unheard-of prices; and the young wife with her husband were driven to take shelter in an obscure second floor at a few shillings per week. Perhaps reproaches and mutual bitterness followed then, where should have been all kindness, and more love each to strengthen the other with fortitude in their adversity. And by chance it may have occurred, likewise, that in his misfortune he could not find another situation; till his young wife became what she had always, till these disastrous times, hoped to become, but now tremblingly dreaded to be. As her wants increased, the gaudy adornments of the past brief time of false hope and groundless confidence, as certainly vanished to supply them; until at last—and *only* at last—what with mother, and baby, and nurse and doctor, and all the small et ceteras indispensable on these occasions, and no employment to meet the expense of them—then went to the pawnbroker's, with some weeping over it by both, the very miniature he had given her to wear in everlasting memory of him, ere a single cloud had come across either, or any thought that the little love-gift of to-day should serve to purchase bread for them both, on some dark sad day in future.

Such, reader, may, perchance, be the brief history of the man upon whose picture you sometimes gaze in the pawnbroker's window. And readily may you if so disposed, follow out for yourself a similar train of thought, for the shop of the pawnbroker is a living volume of texts whereby to hang so many morals, with which no "Lacon" nor "Materials for Thinking" already published, can be put into comparison.

A small row of these curious relics of parental kindness and filial gratitude, and hopeful love—now, alas! all forgotten or unheeded—was suspended across the second row of panes from the bottom, in the shop window of Gabriel Widge's friend, Mr. Isaac Chuckchni, pawnbroker, in Long-acre. There they had hung—some of them at least for years, many years, but they formed a decoration, and possessed at least the value of the old gold about them, and therefore Isaac never troubled himself whether they were sold or unsold; his only care being, that the precious metal in which they were set should never be rubbed or brightened, lest such a process might chance to depreciate their ultimate value by lessening the weight. As for the rest, he concluded them to be the portraits of a pack of fools, or they would never, in the first place, have laid out their money on such unnecessary luxuries, and then in the second, have been obliged to go to him to lend money on them.

At last a customer for one of them appeared one evening towards nightfall, in the person of a well-made and handsome but pale young man of about nineteen years of age. Miss Amelia indeed happened, very accidentally, of course, to be peeping through a certain pane of glass in the door leading from the shop to the back parlor, when that customer entered, and had she told the truth to her mother, who sat beside her, she would have declared that she positively admired him. He, however, innocent soul! was quite unconscious that Miss Chuckchni's eyes were fixed so admiringly upon him, or he would not have proceeded with quite so much coolness and leisure to institute a critical examination of one of her father's miniatures, upon which he appeared to have previously set his mind. It was a simple, unaffected portrait of a man, apparently not more than five-and-twenty years of age, plainly attired, and with nothing but his own good looks to recommend him. These, however, together with the beautiful execution of the head itself, were amply sufficient without other ornament of any kind. About painting, good or bad, Mr. Chuckchin knew but little; he valued the gold at seventeen shillings sterling, and offered the whole for five-and-twenty. His customer was, in reality, a young artist named Hollis, and the bargain he was now making seemed to be for the purpose of supplying himself with a good work of art as a valuable study. Though evidently not oppressed by the weight of too heavy a purse, Mr. Hollis instantly put down the money, and walked away with

his purchase; quite unconscious that such a casual circumstance as that which had just transpired would eventually prove, as it did prove, the most important and singular act of his whole life.

Some weeks after the occurrence above related, a gentleman somewhat advanced in years, but still retaining all the uprightness of carriage and firmness of step usually associated with the most vigorous period of life, called upon Mr. Hollis, and after a brief introduction, informed him that having heard his talents commended highly by parties upon whose judgment he could rely, he was anxious to have a copy of a miniature, which he produced, taken by Mr. Hollis's hand. When the latter cast his eyes upon the picture which the stranger handed to him, a visible expression of surprise passed over his countenance.

"Sir," said he, "the coincidence is exceedingly remarkable, but I think I can supply you with the copy you require without the trouble of making one; for I have now in my possession a drawing the exact counterpart of this," and so saying, Mr. Hollis laid before his visitor the identical miniature which had so long adorned the shop window of Mr. Chuckchin, and been so often gazed at by the travellers down Long-acre. And in truth there was a most marvellous resemblance between the two, —so close, indeed, both in the picture and the setting, that no man could have distinguished one from the other, save that the one brought by the stranger looked bright and worn, as though accustomed to be treasured in the gentle bosom of some loving lady, whose memory of him it represented was everlasting; while that from the pawnbroker's looked more like the neglected keepsake of one who had forgotten soon, and long ago, and in whose bosom such a remembrancer could never find meet resting-place. But the countenance of the stranger when he saw them together was still more remarkable. Had a sudden shot been fired at him he could not have started with greater abruptness, or with an expression of astonishment more intense, than he did at the first sight of the pawnbroker's miniature. His cheeks colored deeply, and then paled as the hot blood reproachfully left them, to tell what no disguise could cover, that some deep tale of sorrow, perhaps, or it might be of criminality also, was called up in the mind of the strange spectator who now gazed upon that little picture. In the course of a few moments, however, his eyes left the portrait, and were fixed with a look of deep scrutiny upon the features of Mr. Hollis. It would almost

seem that he sought for identification, if such were to be found, between the two, but if so he found not what he sought for, nor was it likely he should; but then it must be recollected that the stranger as yet knew not by what an accidental circumstance the miniature had been placed in its present owner's hands.

"Pray, sir," asked the visitor, in a voice which betrayed much stifled emotion of some kind, "how did you obtain possession of this picture?"

"I purchased it," replied Mr. Hollis, "at a pawnbroker's in Long-acre."

"Then you have not had it all your life?" almost involuntarily demanded the stranger; at the same time evincing the deepest interest in the answer that might be given to this apparently unnecessary question.

"Certainly not, sir," answered Mr. Hollis, "not longer than two months at the utmost."

"That's right," groaned the other, "then he must be dead."

"Sir!" exclaimed Hollis.

"I ask your pardon, indeed,—nothing, sir, nothing. I knew not what I was saying. Then you have no objection to part with this again?"

"None, whatever."

"Will five guineas purchase it?"

"Twenty-five shillings purchased it before, sir."

"Take five guinea's, my young friend," answered the visitor, "and be assured that times have been when I should have felt too happy to have so met with it at twenty times five. I know it, sir; it was lost by a lady years ago, and the copy I wished you to make was intended to be its substitute. But you shall not lose your labor; as from this day, if the offer be worthy of your acceptance, I trust you will consider such services as may lie in my power to render, at all times entirely at your command."

Mr. Hollis bowed.

"And more than that; I hope to see you as early a guest at my table as you may feel assured you will be a welcome one."

While Mr. Hollis acknowledged this kindness, he could not but feel some degree of surprise that it should have been so suddenly, and, to all appearance so unnecessarily evinced. The simple fact of his having been the accidental agent in restoring a lost trifle like that picture could scarcely account for it:—there must be some deeper motive hidden under this, though of what nature, or to what end it could be directed, he could not even hope to fathom. Yet there was something in the countenance and manner of the stran-

ger which excited involuntarily an unpleasant sense of suspicion, notwithstanding the very contrary tendency of his words. Intensely expressive of determination not unmingled with treachery, his eyes shone from beneath a projecting forehead and closely knit brows, as might those of a serpent under the penthouse of its hole in a rock; while a certain restlessness of manner, associated as it was with considerable violence of action, arising from the least colloquial excitement, at once and plainly marked him as a man of strong passions, and one to whom a desperate deed, likely to answer his own views, would offer little or no obstacle.

But Mr. Hollis was poor, and had been all his life unfortunate. He was thankful for any one in the form of a friend; and therefore we need not feel surprised that one who appeared so well capable of assisting him, and at the same time so willing also,—however otherwise forbidding—should have received his warmest thanks for those proffered services of which, in reality, he stood so much in need.

Before the stranger took his leave, he inquired particularly at what shop the miniature had been purchased, and the name of the individual who kept it,—

"Not," he said, "because it is of any consequence in itself, but I am curious to know."

His curiosity, however, if that alone actuated him, must have been remarkably strong, for no sooner had he obtained the required information than, without communicating his intentions to Mr. Hollis, he proceeded immediately to Mr. Chuckchin's shop, and having reproduced the drawing before the astonished eyes of that worthy, instituted a strict inquiry respecting the name of the parties who had pledged it, and the particular time at which it was so pledged. The stranger's appearance entitled him to attention, and although certain fears at first flitted across the pawnbroker's mind lest he should be brought into any trouble by it, he yet eventually contrived to find an entry to the effect that it had been pledged on the 27th of October, 18—, in the name of one Nathan Vogle, Swan Alley, St. John's Street, Clerkenwell.

"Nearly twenty years ago!" replied the stranger.

"Very nigh that time, sir," replied Chuckchin, "by entry in this book that no man need fear to swear by."

The gentleman thanked him for his trouble, and instantly hastened homewards, apparently highly gratified with the information he had obtained, and with an expres-

sion upon his countenance which—could it have been seen through his muffled cloak—would have led the passengers whom he met in the street to believe, that there had passed them by a man who had just discovered the clue to some strange and (to him) great mystery upon which his very existence depended, and that very soon he could successfully unravel.

Having arrived at his house, the stranger whom we have thus introduced to the reader—but who, in reality, was a previous and well-known acquaintance of his—awaited impatiently the approach of night; and having previously disguised himself in a manner appropriate to the visit he was about to make, again issued forth and pursued his way towards the locality indicated by Mr. Chuckchin. Darkness already covered the earth, when he entered the narrow and dim passage leading out of St. John's street, called Swan Alley, and instituted an inquiry amongst a cluster of low young women assembled at the top of it, touching the residence of a man named Nathan Vogle. Having obtained the desired information, the stranger advanced down the passage, and gave three or four raps with his stick at the door of a black wooden house, situate just beyond the corner on the right hand side.

"Come in!" exclaimed a shrill feminine voice, in answer to his summons, as though the person who spoke took it for granted that she was addressing one of her own class, or some recognised neighbor. But the stranger, instead of obeying her command, only replied to it by another knock.

"Come in!" again cried the same voice, "od bless me, folks seem to think one can be pulling one's arms out of the tub every minit just for the sake of lifing up a latch!" But in the next instant the door was opened, and a woman of middle stature presented herself, worn, wrinkled, and yellow, with her sleeves rolled up nearly to the shoulders, and displaying a pair of hard working brawny arms, finished off with two large unfeminine looking, but sodden fists, in one of which was grasped a large towel twisted into a sort of womanly shilalah.

"Mr. Vogle lives here?" asked the stranger.

"My name's Missis Vogle," replied the woman; "but if it's my husband as you want, Lor' bless you sir, you're fifteen year too late!—He's been dead and gone these fifteen—ay, nigh on these fifteen year ago. He was a good carpenter, sir, I can assure you; and if it's a coffin, sir, as you want in a hurry, no man on earth could iv made it sooner: but I can recommend you, sir, to

Patrick Behan, just below here, that'll do your honor the pleasure, sir, and give you all the satisfaction in the world, sir. He always keeps his wood sawed, and fit for all sizes, from a baby to a full grown big Christian."

The stranger smiled at this unexpected announcement, and informed the lady that it appeared according to her statement that he more required a corpse than a coffin, the latter of which he most certainly was not in search of.

"Then if it's any thing else in the carpentering, I'm sure, Patrick—"

"Nothing whatever, I assure you, my good woman," replied he, "but if you are Nathan Vogle's widow, I wish to speak to you." And so saying, he stepped within the threshold, and closed the door behind him.

Mrs. Vogle evidently had now but two thoughts in her head, one of which was, that (knowing nothing of the statue of limitations) her visitor had come to make some unheard of demand upon her small resources in requital of an old debt of her husband's, and the other, that he might be some mysterious stranger who, by better luck, had brought her good news from she knew not where, and for reasons which no depth of hers could fathom. Thus placed in a kind of personal conflict with herself, and momentarily bandied about between the battledoor of fear and hope, she scarce-knew on the instant what to do. Accordingly, like a sensible washerwoman as she was, she swept the suds from her arms into the tub, and having hastily half wiped them on her apron, caught hold of the back of a wooden chair made in more prosperous days by Mr. Vogle himself, and invited the stranger to sit down.

"And what's your blessed will, sir?" said she, giving her twisted towel an additional screw, effective enough to squeeze the very last drop of moisture out of it. "I'm a poor lone widow, sir, druv up to take to th' tub for a livelihood, and hard work it is, I can assure you. If you'll believe me, sir, it costs me nigh hard as much for soap, perlash, starch, and coals as I can any how get by it. Shirts is but thrippence, sir, and other little things I gets only ninenpence a dozen for. Then I have to pay my rent, buy bread, candles, Yarmouth bloaters, beer—one can't work without a sup of beer, sir, as I dare say you have felt yourself."

"True, my good woman, no doubt," replied the stranger, "but you must not mistake me for a commissioner of inquiry into any thing of that sort. If your husband had been alive, and since he is not, perhaps

you yourself can answer me instead. I wished to make a little inquiry about a miniature which I understand he pawned with Mr. Chuckchin in Long Acre, nearly twenty years ago."

Mrs. Vogle began to fear there was danger in the wind, and accordingly pretended to know nothing whatever about it; a statement in which she strongly persisted, until repeatedly and fully assured by the visitor that so far from bringing her into any trouble, he would take care to reward her in case she could give him such information touching the manner in which Mr. Vogle came by it, as he wished to obtain.

"Od bless you, then, sir," exclaimed the washerwoman, "I do remember a bit of a summut about it, but it's so long ago, you see, and I've been up to my elbows in hot water ever since, that I'm afeared it's in great part washed out of my mind."

"Let us know what you do remember, at all events," remarked her auditor.

"I will, sir, I will," said she, and accordingly began. "Well, sir, as my poor Nathan, you see, was a carpenter by trade, and worked sometimes for a undertaker up here in Singin' Street, it happened very often that folks didn't go off quite so ready as they might have done, and then may-happened he'd nuffin to do at all, neither in th' buildin' line, nor in th' coffin way."

"Well, sir, at that time, as sure as you sit on that there chair, at that time, sir, we had not a bit of bread entered this door for three or four days together; 'taties and Scotch barley was the best we could get anyhow. It was the latter end of the year, I think about October—and building was not a prosperin', as it does in good weather. However, as Providence had ordered it, a gentleman that he knew bought a row of carcases somewhere up to the nor'ard quarter of the town, and my poor Nathan was put on a little job shortly after to go and do a bit of th' inside part of the woodwork."

"When he comed home at dark-hour that same day—I remember it as well as if it was an hour ago—he walks in with a pleasant countenance on his face, and says he to me, says he, 'Norah, my wench, you've heard of 'Lijah being fed by the ravens in the wilderness?' says he. 'I should be no Crishtan,' says I, 'if I had'nt, Nathan.' 'Then,' said he, again, 'I have been like 'Lijah myself to-day; for, besides my wages, I've had a god-send of this gold pictur' which I picked up from among the shavings and rubbish down in the underground-story of one of Mister Squatter's carcases.'

"It was a beautiful young man, sir,"

continued Mrs. Vogle, "about two or three-and-twenty; and one as looked to deserve a hangel for his wife, if ever man could have one."

The stranger evinced considerable uneasiness; and could scarcely disguise his tremor, as he demanded of Mrs. Vogle, in a faltering voice, whether her husband had found *any thing else* there besides the picture.

"Not a hatom!" exclaimed the washerwoman, energetically: "but he said it looked as if somebody had lately slept there—perhaps some unfortunate lady, sir; don't you think that's likely, sir?"

The stranger frowned, but made no reply; while Mrs Vogle pursued her narrative.

"Well, after that, sir, things fell worse and worse again; till we wanted vittles as much as ever we did before, and then it was that my poor Nathan went out one night and pawned the pictur at a shop a long way off from home, that nobody might know he was obliged to do sich a thing. That's exactly how it was, as true as them dirty things there lies in soak at this blessed minnit!"

"Then you are sure your husband did not see any thing else at all?"

"Not a chip, nor a shavin', sir; at least, I mean alligolically—there was neither man, woman, nor child, in the place."

"And that is all you know?"

"I wish it had been!" exclaimed the superintendent of the tub; "but the worst on't is all to come. If my poor Nathan had never 'found that pictur', he might have been here now; it cost him his life, and made me a poor widder, I do assure you."

"Indeed!—was he hanged?" exclaimed the stranger.

"Lord forgive you for saying so," ejaculated Mrs. Vogle, "you, yourself have quite as much to be hanged for as ever he had. Hanged, indeed! I know I've kept a wididy out of respect to him ever since, for I'm sure Mr. Behan would be glad to jump at me if I'd have him; and I shouldn't have done that if he'd died on Newgate, nor would any man make any insinuations of that sort to a hanging widdes. We have one of them down the alley here, and though she's as innocent as skimm'd milk, and very pretty, yet somehow all respectable journeymen turns up their noses at her, and has done for these three years past! No, sir; I can assure you my poor Nathan died as respectable a death as any man or woman need wish for, though it was a very unchristian accident as brought it on, and all through that unlucky pictur', as I'm a

living woman. I wish he'd been in the workus sooner than ever have picked it up; for if you'll believe my word, sir, as he was coming back again from Long Acre, where he had pawned it, and was crossing Holborn, exactly opposite Red Lyon Street, a coach come up all on a sudden—and some of them hackneys drive so uncommonly venomous—comes up and knocks him down. Two wheels went over his body, broke his ribs, and did such a lasting hinjery to his liver that he never got over it. They mended him a good deal at the hospital, and for a year or more after, he managed light work very well; but he kept getting thinner and thinner, thinner and thinner, till really I use to think sometimes that all his bones would come through his skin. For a long while we lived on allowance from the sick club that he was in, but at last they stopped that, because they found out he was doing a little work just to amuse himself with at home. You, see sir, he was a very ingenious man, very clever at his trade, indeed; and as he couldn't go to work, he employed himself in making his own coffin, bit by bit; but at the same time he didn't know how long it might be before he should want it, he put hinges and a lock on the lid, and fitted up the inside all so comfortable and beautiful, with nice shelves, and then had it fixed up in that corner there to serve instead of a cupboard, and a very delightful cupboard it made. Some people used to be rather frightened at first, and some did not like eating and drinking out of it; but that was all nonsense, for you know, sir, there was nothing more than the shape in it after all; and one shape is just as sweet and clean for a cupboard as another. He was a very ingenious man, sir, I do assure you. However, though it's nigh on twenty years ago since he was run over, I have hated venomous driving ever since; and I'm sure, that when he died and was obliged to be buried in that cupboard, I missed it as much as any thing, and felt the loss of it equal to the worst thing that ever happened in my life."

With which compliment to the memory of "poor Nathan," Mrs. Vogle sunk into silence a few moments in order to take breath. Before the stranger ventured to speak, the lady resumed with this latter and concluding piece of information.

"But I did not feel my lonely situation quite so much as I should have done, though I felt it quite enough, God knows! because my poor Nathan was an old member of a Burial Society, and I received a consolation of ten pounds from the secretary as a sort of reward for his death."

Thus possessed, apparently, of all the information which that quarter was capable of yielding, as well of a great deal more which he by no means required, the stranger rose, and having thanked Mrs. Vogle for the trouble she had bestowed, as well as deposited upon the table, a more than sufficient reward for it, took his leave.

It is perhaps needless to inform the reader that the stranger here spoken of—the promised friend and patron of our new acquaintance,—young Hollis—was no other than Mr. THOROTON.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. THOROTON AND BENASSAR THE TURK—WHO THE LATTER WAS—WITH A QUARREL THAT ENSUED BETWEEN THEM.

THUS far, then, Mr. Thoroton was satisfied that the destination and ultimate fate of the child with whose unhappy history we commenced this narrative, was beyond the possibility of discovery by any research of his; and that it had remained a mystery for now nearly twenty years, so, in all probability it would remain forever. But during the long lapse of time since we introduced him to the notice of the reader until now, changes then anticipated had come to pass; and instead of entrapping others, both Mr. Thoroton and his lady had fallen into their own snare. For although they had proved so apparently successful in putting out of the way the rightful inheritor of Woodhouselee, and had lived from year to year in wicked hope that his unfortunate mother would soon be brought down to the grave by sorrows not to be surmounted or forgotten, yet had they in that respect met with continual disappointment.

As though almost by an especial providence which would not suffer such black guilt to triumph over the innocent and unsuspecting victim, and Lady Lavinia had passed safely through all her trials—had endured nights and weeks, and years on years of unhappiness, with a degree of fortitude scarcely to have been expected—and even at the time of which we are now speaking, still survived to stand (though unconsciously to herself) between the Thorotons and that object, the attainment of which was dearer to them than their own sister's life. Thus, then, through a period of nearly twenty years, had Mr. and Mrs.

Thoroton been compelled to endure one of the least endurable of all human feelings—that arising from the consciousness of having committed a great and desperate crime without having obtained the object contemplated by it, or answering any other purpose than that of rendering themselves at once deeply criminal in their own eyes, and liable at any moment or by any accident to become responsible to those laws of society which they had so basely outraged. But what in this particular instance, had so aggravated their disappointment, and converted their mortification almost into frenzy, was, the continual and large pecuniary exactions to which they found themselves compelled to submit, and which were extorted from them by Benassar the Turk, in order to keep the tongue of that worthy silent, not with respect to the Lady Lavinia only, but also the public authorities themselves; since they were well aware, that if ever their widowed sister was made acquainted with the deep deception which had been practised upon her respecting her child, not only would their expectations from her be forever destroyed, but the complete degradation of the characters, the total loss of all standing in society, as well as severe judicial punishment, must inevitably follow any such exposure.

Sufficient may have been gathered from the previous portion of this history to demonstrate, that the old Turk, or rather the pretended one, was not only perfectly well aware of the power which his knowledge of their criminality gave him, but equally as prepared to wield it in the manner best calculated to work for his own advantage. An illustration of that disposition we have already seen on occasion of the first interview between Mrs. Thoroton and himself; while the success with which it was then attended emboldened him, if possible, still more, in the determined resolution he had formed to hold the information of which he was possessed in continual terror over both the guilty parties, as a lasting and successful means for obtaining from them whatever sums of money he might demand, and also compelling the grant of any other services and favors which he chanced to require, and they possessed the power to give. By the force of this conduct, founded on such a secret, he had gradually, and almost imperceptibly, obtained a degree of influence over even the stern and desperate character of Mr. Thoroton, which, at the time we are now speaking of, might not inaptly be designated as the most complete and triumphant personal despotism. But it was not by

threats and the influence of fear alone that he had done this; his policy not unfrequently induced him to resort to that kind of hypocritical cajolery which sought to attain its purpose quietly, and without the appearance of direct compulsion, rather than carry but more frequently than was absolutely necessary that feeling of insolent defiance, by which even the most criminal are at times, apt to be aroused into a state of desperate and reckless hostility. Still it was by the adoption of each of these modes of conduct, just as the occasion required, that Benassar contrived eventually, and in the course of such a considerable number of years, to sway, as with a wand of magic, the fierce temper of Mr. Thoroton, as well as the deep hypocrisy of his wife.

Mr. Thoroton's first knowledge of the interference of this dangerous character, was derived from a statement made to him by his wife respecting the transactions related in a previous chapter of this history, as having taken place between that lady and the stranger himself. Mr. Thoroton expressed much astonishment on hearing the account, and in vain endeavored to frame some plausible conjuncture as to who the person could really be, and by what means he had possessed himself of so much accurate knowledge of an affair which up to that time, he believed to be totally unknown to any man, save the physician who had attended the Lady Lavinia, and the absurd old pretender to astrology, whom he had discovered in the vaults of the Adelphi. Could it be the latter? There were reasons both for and against this supposition, which he could not satisfactorily dispose of on either side; nor is it probable he would have arrived at any satisfactory conclusion, had not a second visit by the selfsame individual been paid some considerable time afterwards, for the purpose of raising another of those "loans," the precedent for granting which had already been set by his wife. Mr. Thoroton happened on this second occasion to be at home; and having previously expressed himself in a very determined manner respecting the treatment which the fellow should receive at his hands, in case an opportunity were ever afforded him of meeting with him under similar circumstances, it may easily be credited, that when that faithful servant John one day announced a second visit from the same individual, Mr. Thoroton hastened in no very amiable humor into the library, whither John had conducted him.

"Well, sir,—and what do you want of me?" sternly demanded Thoroton, as he

securely closed the doors, and before he had time to look particularly at the person he addressed.

"In the first instance," replied Benassar, "I require civility and attention. In the second——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Thoroton, recognising the voice—"you are the villain then, are you, with your magical nonsense and devilish lies, who has practised this infamous extortion upon a defenceless and helpless woman? But I am glad you are come again, —I thank you for coming,—for before you leave a second time you shall pay dearly for your swindling, or there's no virtue in a rope's-end and a horse-pond. Come along, you scoundrel, or——"

"When our business is transacted I shall depart," replied the disguised astrologer, "*but not before*; even though your bidding be backed by all your household."

"Come along, thou disreputable knave!" again exclaimed Thoroton, endeavoring to seize Saul by the loose garment which he wore, and drag him out.

"Nay!" cried the latter,—"*the first finger laid on me shall cost two lives!*"

"None of your idle tales with me," said his antagonist; "I am not a woman, fool, to heed your trickery and lies. Come out this instant, fellow, or I'll——"

"Run the chance of a gallows for murder, if you do——" interrupted Saul. "Peace, man, peace; be quiet." And then raising his voice to a higher pitch, and in a most determined tone, he added, "I shall not leave this room till my business with you is settled." At the same time he rose erect, and folding his arms across his breast, gazed into the eyes of his opponent with an expression at once of defiance and of cool conscious security, which, for the moment, made Mr. Thoroton involuntarily waver in his determination. Instantly, however, he felt again reassured, and with that assurance his indignation and excitement became still greater than before.

"If that, then, be it," he exclaimed, "let us take another course." And so saying, he snatched from a corner of the room in which it stood, one of the old dress swords common in earlier times, and which had once adorned the thigh of one of his own ancestors. Ripping it instantly from its scabbard, he rushed upon the astrologer with the intention, perhaps, not so much of wounding him as of obliging him to submit when he saw that resistance was useless. But at the same moment Saul stepped backward, and drawing a dagger eight inches long from beneath his vest, boldly stood with that little implement on his defence.

Mr. Thoroton was now excited in the utmost degree, and he made several passes at his opponent, which the latter very dexterously parried with the comparatively small weapon in his hand. The clash of steel brought Mrs. Thoroton screaming into the apartment, and almost ere her entrance could be seen, she had fallen upon the bosom of her husband; partly through terror, and partly in an unconscious effort to prevent the effusion of blood.

Here, then, happily, the affray was put an end to, at least for the present; as Saul quietly returned his dagger to its place, and Mr. Thoroton hastily laid aside his sword to render assistance to his wife, who had now fainted at the sight of those weapons of death.

"Mr. Thoroton," observed Saul, after the lady had been removed to her own chamber, and they found themselves again alone, "this is worse than folly; for to quarrel with me is but to destroy yourself. Your interest, your liberty—nay, perhaps your life also, depend upon your keeping faith and friendship with me."

"Friendship!" savagely muttered Thoroton, between his firmly-closed teeth.

"Ay,—friendship:—why not? Did I not advise you to abandon your design, to restore the child to its mother, to make no further attempt in a scheme that could never succeed; and in which, even if it had succeeded, success would have dyed your soul with a deeper crime than even has this failure? Does that deserve no friendship? Come, come, no ingratitude besides. By following my advice you had now been free: by following your own passions you are now wholly in my power."

"And if you dare to make use of anything you know,"—interrupted Thoroton, yet hesitating in the middle of his sentence, like a man who would threaten vengeance, but feels he has it not within his reach.

"Refuse me what I require," rejoined Saul, "and before the night comes I will 'dare' to do that which you will never dare to meet."

Mr. Thoroton strode impatiently up and down the room, with a feeling of restlessness only to be compared to that evinced by some wild beast that tracks from end to end of his cage, savagely impatient of restraint, yet totally incapable of escape from it.

However, as we have other matters of greater interest and importance to relate, we shall not dwell upon this interview between Mr. Thoroton and Saul further than by observing that notwithstanding its unfavorable commencement, it eventually

lasted nearly three hours;—that upon its conclusion, Saul, a second time, departed from the house considerably richer than he went to it; and that from the period now spoken of, was established that system of extortion under which the Thoroton's had struggled for upwards of nineteen years;—a system which had materially lessened their fortune after that long lapse of time, but from which, nevertheless, they found it impossible to extricate themselves. While they grew poor, (comparatively speaking) in the incessant endeavor to keep a crime hidden, Saul was growing rich by hiding it, and when at length the demands of the latter became so frequent and so large, that they could no longer be complied with, consistently with the establishment which Mr. Thoroton had hitherto kept, he found himself literally obliged to change his residence, and reduce that establishment in order to meet the avaricious views of his tormentor, rather than run any risk of a discovery for the prevention of which he had so long paid.

At the same time, the astrologer himself preserved precisely the same character and appearance as he ever did before. The wealth he obtained from his victims was safely hoarded up, or applied in such a manner as to produce him exorbitant interest; while he continued to reside in the same old house wherein we originally found him, and to live amidst the same squalid poverty, as though he actually possessed not a farthing in the world. What could be the reason of all this? Perhaps the reader may conjecture when he calls to mind the declaration of Saul to his daughter Agatha, previously recorded. "If Woodhouselee be not mine in the end, instead of theirs, there is no truth in this faith."

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

MR. THOROTON AND MR. HOLLIS—AN INCIDENT IN THE FIELDS—WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE DINNER.

IN even a worse position than that described in the preceding chapter was Mr. Thoroton placed with respect to the astrologer, at the period when we have re-introduced him to the reader in company with the young man Hollis. Every plan that his imagination could suggest had he already tried to shake off the hateful control, and rid himself of the heavy tax imposed by

the crafty and hypocritical Saul; but each and all in turn had signally failed. The discovery of the miniature, however, gave him new hope. He trusted that a little time would enable him to trace the parties who had dragged it from Mrs. Thoroton's bosom, on that eventful night when her sister's child was exposed, as previously described. It was evident from Mrs. Vogle's own statement that some person or other must have carried him away before morning, while the account communicated by his own wife bore out the fact that at the time of his being laid there some one other individual at least was present in the dark besides herself. Who could that be? For even presuming—what was not unlikely—that some unfortunate outcast or other had crept into the place for a night's shelter, how improbable did it appear that such an one should voluntarily have burdened him or herself with such an additional trouble as an infant but lately born, must necessarily prove? He knew not how to account for it; except on the supposition that the individual, whoever he might be, had, on awaking at daybreak, found the child dead; and fearing lest he should thereby become involved in trouble, had buried it in some quiet spot of the wild and broken ground immediately in the neighborhood. Certainly none but a shelterless and forlorn outcast could have been here that night:—he knew that no one had watched him in his progress home, and that Mrs. Thoroton's subsequent proceedings must have been entirely unobserved, as they were unsuspected. What other probable conjecture then could he form? For, remote a possibility as it seemed, that conjecture was still, under all the circumstances, the nearest approaching to possibility that he could hit upon. In the absence of actual knowledge, however, both he and his wife remained for some time afterwards in a state at once of fear and hope:—fear lest the child should be found dead, and an inquiry leading to their detection should be instituted; and hope that, if he were yet alive, he might have fallen into the hands of those who would never make public what they knew of the matter.

Such, indeed, after even this long lapse of years, were still their feelings; for time, which wears away all else, seldom wears away the natural fear that conscious guilt leaves, as if for a witness against it, upon the mind. Nor is it probable that either of them would ever have felt their bosoms even partially at rest upon the subject, had not a very singular discovery been accidentally made one evening in the waste ground behind the house where Mrs. Thoroton had

left the baby, by some workmen who were digging out the earth for the foundations of certain buildings intended to be erected on the spot. This remarkable affair occurred on the very day on which Mr. Thoroton had for the first time invited the young artist, Mr. Hollis, to his table.

The house towards which, on the occasion of this invitation from his friend and patron, Mr. Hollis directed his footsteps, was situated in what at that time might be considered a retired and almost lonely part of the road leading to Kentish Town, and on the right-hand side, immediately beyond where the present toll-bar stands. Though much inferior to the one formerly occupied by Mr. Thoroton, the old building presented not only that highly picturesque appearance so peculiar to the gabled brick and timber edifices of some centuries ago, but also contained ample room enough to constitute a modern mansion; besides affording, in its old-fashioned sense of homely comfort, innumerable snug corners, and deep closets, and fanciful small windows let far into the walls, and strange little angles, and bits of room, partitioned off in the upper stories like so many cells of a rabbit-warren, affording accommodation for all things or any thing, though without the least appearance throughout of plan or order.

The parlor on the left-hand of the entrance, as well as a large back drawing room on the second floor, were curiously covered with the carved "napkin" wainscoting, as it was termed, common about the period of Henry VIII., while a good, though by no means elaborate, Gothic chimney-piece of chiselled stone adorned the fireplace of the latter room. A fine old jasmine nearly covered the whole front of the building; from the walls of which to the roadside extended an excellent garden, plentifully stocked with flowers and shrubs; but high over the heads of which rose two taper and elegant yew trees, planted according to some old by-gone taste, one on each side the path before the door.

Shortly after young Hollis's arrival, his friend, Mr. Thoroton, invited him to take a short walk previous to the hour of dinner; and in the course of their ramble, which extended some considerable distance farther than was at first intended, they casually arrived in the neighborhood of Thoroton's former residence;—a house which the latter named gentleman particularly pointed out to his companion as having formerly been his own habitation. From thence they extended their walk across the fields previously alluded to, and where a number of workmen were engaged in digging out

the soil for the foundations of some contemplated new erections.

In passing by they observed a man intently engaged on the examination of a portion of apparently newly-thrown up soil, and approaching nearer, discovered, to their amazement, that it consisted of a portion of decayed linen, which had evidently been rolled up in a bundle, while in the middle of it were found the fragments of a few small bones, apparently those of a human being. Mr. Thoroton at that sight, uttered no exclamation, but maintained a profound silence, though his countenance suddenly changed to a deadly paleness, and his nerves became strongly agitated.

"This looks very much like a child-murder," observed Mr. Hollis, as he stooped to pick up a portion of the remains, and then examined them in his hand:—a dark deed has been done here, I am afraid."

Mr. Thoroton stood like a statue; while his dry tongue seemed as if it would cleave everlastingly to the roof of his mouth, and never again give him power to utter one word of denial against the deep charge of "murder," which now his conscience made. That these were the remains of the Lady Lavinia's boy he knew; they must be so;—for whose beside could they be? Nobody else could have committed murder but himself and his wife;—no,—nobody.

"Let us go away," at last he stammered, the sight and the thoughts of such a crime are horrible! Besides, we had better avoid being called as witnesses to this discovery. What could I say upon it? I could say nothing, sir;—nothing. We know nothing about it, Mr. Hollis, neither of us. Perhaps it is a mistake, after all, and they are not the bones of a child."

Mr. Hollis expressed his firm conviction that they were.

"Let us hope not," Mr. Thoroton again repeated in a more assured but forced tone of voice; "but even if so, I am always reluctant to suspect whom I do not know; it is on the side of humanity and charity to do so. Perhaps, instead of murder, it is misfortune! and some poor unhappy creature has secretly buried there her dead-born child and her shame in one grave together."

"Perhaps so, indeed, sir!" added Mr. Hollis, who felt considerably impressed both with the manner and the observations of his new friend.

For sometime afterwards they pursued their way in silence; Mr. Thoroton appearing so busily engaged with his own thoughts that he almost forgot the companion beside him. At the same time he unconsciously

hurried forwards at a very unusual speed; and even arrived within sight of the walls of his own dwelling before he appeared to be reminded of his situation or aroused from his reflections. Ere they entered the garden-gate, Mr. Thoroton suddenly turned upon his young friend and abruptly addressed him in the following words:—

"I have a favor to request of you, Mr. Hollis, which I feel assured you will oblige me by conferring. Let what we have seen be neither mentioned nor alluded to in any manner within those walls. Mrs. Thoroton is too sensitive on such subjects; and her sister, Lady Woodhouselee, from a peculiar and afflicting family visitation which occurred some years ago, could not, I am sure, be informed of such a circumstance without having awakened within her mind feelings of the most painful nature."

"Enough, sir, and more than enough," replied the young man; "my thanks are due to you for having prevented me from inadvertently doing that which I should deeply regret, the having given, however unconsciously, the least pain to any human creature living."

Mr. Thoroton acknowledged his young acquaintance's remark, and conducted him into the house. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Hollis was introduced for the first time to Mrs. Thoroton, to the Lavinia, of Woodhouselee, and to a young and handsome girl of eighteen, a friend of the latter's, named Christabel Sylverthorne. They, indeed, with Mr. Thoroton himself, constituted the whole party that met at dinner.

It was not a happy meeting; for Mr. Thoroton appeared even yet much too agitated, too absorbed in his own reflections to pay that due attention to his company which etiquette and good feeling at once demanded. Happily, however, all present, with the single exception of Mr. Hollis, knew him to be a wayward-tempered, passionate, and moody man, and although each of the three ladies evidently observed the excitement under which he labored, and perhaps wondered at the cause of it, the circumstance was for awhile assilently and quietly passed by as though either it had never existed or had never been remarked at all. Meantime, while Mr. Thoroton regarded the more solid aliments and delicacies before him with indifference, if not with absolute distaste, he applied himself with greater frequency to the wines upon the table, as though in the resort to that unnatural and violent method of excitement alone lay his refuge from the painful thoughts that haunted him.

"I trust nothing has occurred to disturb

you?" at length remarked Mrs. Thoroton, addressing her husband.

"Not within about the last twenty years," replied he with a peculiarity of look and expression which that lady appeared to understand better than any other person, for she not only turned pale, but instantly sunk into a deep reserved silence, as though by those few words a seal had been placed upon her lips. At the same time an expression of melancholy surprise passed over the countenance of the Lady Lavinia, as she momentarily raised her large eyes till they met those of Mr. Thoroton, and then cast them to the ground in sad recollection of the events which that expression of "twenty years" recalled. She thought of the time when and where first this history began—of the heavy blight which then fell upon her life, and of those heart-agonies which human nature may endure once, but that cannot be survived on a repetition. And to a similar class of recollections did she in her innocence and simplicity of heart also attribute, however insanely, the present feelings and manners of her brother-in-law, Mr. Thoroton.

"We must have your portrait, my dear sister," at length remarked Mrs. Thoroton, with assumed playfulness, as she looked affectingly affectionate in the face of the Lady Lavinia.

"Mine!—oh, no!—no! not mine. You know me too well already to need such a frail remembrance, and I have no one else to bequeath it to."

"Humble as ever!" exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton, "but we must have it, nevertheless. Your beauty, sister,—excuse me, I have not forgotten your years,—would give it intrinsic value even to those who never knew you; and, besides, from the report of Mr. Thoroton, I doubt not the talents of Mr. Hollis would in every way do ample justice to the subject."

The young artist's eyes just then fell on the countenance of the individual alluded to. What a study would it have made for the beautiful Helena of the Iliad.

"Do you paint history, Mr. Hollis?" asked Lady Lavinia, as though anxious to divert the conversation.

"I have starved upon it, madam," answered he, "not lived upon it."

"Indeed! it is a common fate, I am told. So, unmeaning faces, and heads, enough to frighten a phrenologist, take the lead do they?"

"Exactly so, Lady Woodhouselee; for rarely indeed is an artist so favored as to meet with a study as pleasing as that to which Mrs. Thoroton has alluded."

"Come, come, you flatter: but I forgive you, it is a part of an artist's profession; but you shall paint me an historical picture if you will. Domestic history I mean. Paint my worthy brother and sister here, standing by a heavy curtain in a large old room, and weeping their eyes out. But do not show what for, let that be hidden; yes," she added, reflectively, let that be all imagined. Only at the top you may put the figure of a little angel winging its way upwards—make him beautiful, will you? and then—then"—she paused as the tears swelled largely in her bright, black eyes, "but no, that is enough, I want no more."

Mr. Hollis bent his head, but somehow, now he most wished it, he could not speak. The two "historical figures" alluded to changed color, and bore such a remarkable resemblance of expression, that but for the difference of sex between them, either might have been substituted for the other.

"Shall they be portraits too, Lady Woodhouselee?" at length asked Mr. Hollis.

"Why, truly," replied Lavinia, passing her handkerchief over her eyes, "I doubt not my dear sister and brother will have no objections to oblige me."

"Not for the world," exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton, "the very recollection pains me to death; and I am sure Mr. Thoroton is too sensitive ever to undergo such an endurance as that must necessarily be—are you not, my dear?"

"Oh, your sister is only joking," replied Mr. Thoroton, "she cannot really mean any thing of the kind."

"Excuse me, but indeed I do!" rejoined the lady; "such a picture as that, hung below the portrait of Sir Stephen would make all mournful memories complete. Besides, the young gentleman wants encouragement, and you admit he deserves it." Then addressing Mr. Hollis, she added—"paint it, sir, life size, and send it to my house as soon as done. I have no family to make demands upon my purse, and in that case, as God gives not wealth to lie idle, it is our duty to assist, as far as we can, the indigent and struggling genius which at present too extensively exists."

Our artist returned thanks, as in duty bound; but found all succeeding efforts to induce Mr. and Mrs. Thoroton to sit for the contemplated picture totally fruitless. He was not, however, to be thus wholly disappointed; for during the course of the evening he seized on various opportunities, unperceived by the parties themselves, of making such hasty sketches as would enable him afterwards to elaborate both features and character to his satisfaction. And with

these in his possession he that night returned home a happier man than the sun had shone on in his person for a period of years. Not, however, without receiving an invitation to the Lady Lavinia's own house next day, in order to take drawings of the particular room, furniture, and decorations which were to constitute the scenery and accessories of this, his first commissioned picture.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

LAUNCELOT AIMS HIGH BUT MISSES HIS MARK; AND AFTERWARDS BECOMES ONE OF THE FRATERNITY OF "MUSEUMITES."

WHEN Mr. Launcelot Widge returned to the Griesbackian studio, he found that his fame had spread far and wide. Through the agency of a few paltry newspapers, the information contained in the following paragraph had become noised abroad.

"DUEL PREVENTED.—L. W——, Esq., a young artist of rising celebrity, and a Mr. S. W—— (not his brother, as our readers might suppose from the similarity of the names), have fortunately been prevented by the activity of the authorities from engaging in a hostile meeting, which was about to take place near the metropolis.

"We understand the first-named gentleman is well known as a 'dead shot,' and that blood must inevitably have been spilt had the affair proceeded. His residence, we may add, is not more than a thousand miles from St. Martin's-lane."

From all sides did Lancy receive so many congratulations and compliments upon his valor and determination, that although at heart he knew the whole affair to be an ardent piece of fudge, he was eventually almost persuaded to believe himself the hero that people told him he was. His father, Gabriel, was so delighted, that he purchased twenty copies of each paper containing the paragraph, and transmitted them to every one of his relatives and particular acquaintance, with the blanks filled up in imitation print, in order to cheat the post-office. While the two Misses Chuckchins suddenly evinced a most marvellous admiration for heroes of all sorts, notwithstanding their previous attempts to prevent the act of heroism itself on the part of Launcy. They made quite a "pet" of the

dear youth, and declared, each of them, that before ever they would consent to wed a husband, they would first of all make him solemnly promise never to engage in a duel, lest his dear life should chance to fall an untimely sacrifice.

"Now, Launcy, my boy!" exultingly exclaimed Mr. Widge, senior, one day as the time for sending the drawings of candidates for studentship at Somerset House drew nigh. "Ain't you going to get into the academy this time, Launcy? Push hard, you know, my boy—best leg first; just clap an extra spur into the ribs of your genius, and the thing is done. I know you can if you will, and then we'll have a try for a pictur in next year's exhibition. Think how nice it would but look in the catalogue—FAMILY GROUP—*Launcelot Widge*. Or if you feel inclined to be poetical, say HECTOR AND A DROMEDARY, or something of that sort, out of ancient mythology. That's the ticket—go it, my boy, and we'll gain the day yet before any body knows we're coming!" and as Gabriel uttered this apostrophe, he slapped Launcelot on the shoulder with a degree of encouraging violence, that made his scapula tingle again. "But I say, Launcy," he added, after thus securing his son's undivided attention, "parents is always anxious, you know; have you settled in your own mind yet what department of the art you mean to follow in pertikler when you've got into th' academy? Is it to be Mike Angle-o, or Titmarsh, or what?"

"All sorts, of course," answered Lance. "A man that can do one thing can do another; but portraits is the main thing for bringing in the brass, and them I mean to stick to mostly."

"That's right, my boy," cried Gabriel. "Like to see that! Keep your eye on the corporal, 'cos you know your eddication's cost a pretty penny already. 'Shent per shent,' as the Jews says, eh, Launcy? No big men without big purses, my boy! Make yourself clever in all branches, and then if one fails, why, there's another ready; that's what I call wisdom."

And with such sort of encouragement did Mr. Widge, senior, daily and nightly stuff the maw of his son's vanity until the long looked for day arrived, when the list of candidates, whose drawings had been approved by the council of the Academy was to be suspended on that fateful pillar in the hall, upon which so many young, ambitious eyes have looked in hope, but to turn away sadly, and in despair.

It was a busy day at Mr. Griesback's. None of those students who had "sent in,"

could bend their agitated minds to work : while all who had not, felt such a lively interest in the fates of those who had, that neither could they achieve one hour's good labor in the course of the day. The consequence was, that several "footings," of half-a-crown each, much to the delight of a neighboring pastry-cook, who thereby cleared nearly a whole counter of "the good things of our childhood's world."

Launcelot felt so delighted, and so sure of success, that he bet two separate aristocratic half-guineas against two plebeian shillings upon the certainty of his admittance. About three o'clock two messengers of credibility, accompanied by Mr. Widge, himself, were despatched to Somerset House for the purpose of examining the list. The porter, decorated with an official red coat, and breeches to correspond, had just hung it up. The names were eagerly run over, but on a first reading the name of Launcelot could not be discovered. Launce turned pale, and drew in his breath exactly as though he had unexpectedly been plunged into a cold bath. He read it again and again, but with the same result. There must be some mistake about it. He applied to the porter. The porter declared it was quite accurate, as the council had actually admitted all the applicants this time, with the single exception of Mr. Widge. Was it possible? Launce actually wondered whether or not he was in his right senses, and verily began to suspect he was laboring under a temporary aberration of intellect, which made matters appear darker and more unpropitious to him than they truly were. But, inasmuch as he found everybody else about him suffering under precisely the same hallucination on the subject, he did not dare to conclude that all had gone mad together, and therefore reconciled the damning fact to his mind as well as he could. On returning to the study he would have been rather unmercifully roasted, had he not, with an assumed bold, free air, paid down his guinea in three bottles of champagne for the benefit of the company, and of which Mr. Griesback, by deputation, was requested to partake.

"Well, Launcey," exclaimed Mr. Widge, senior, as the interesting youth that evening ushered himself through the paternal shop in his passage to the dining-room, "Student R.A., of course! I congratulate you, my boy——"

"Just shut that up a bit, Gabriel," replied Launcelot, "and save it till next time. Not in, old fellow, just yet, so don't be in a hurry."

"Not in! Not in! Come, come, Launce,

none of your tricks upon travellers here; it'll do up stairs just to make fun of your mother with, but I'm the man what's paid for all, so just tell me the truth and no mistake."

"I ain't in, I tell you again," peevishly, not to say savagely, replied he.

"Well, I never! you don't say so?" and Gabriel ordered the shop goods to be set straight, the shutters to be put up as soon as it struck eight o'clock, and rushed up stairs with his son to hear the whole particulars of this monstrous disappointment. We shall not repeat the conversation, but content ourselves by simply stating that the conclusion at which both Mr. Widge, senior, and his hopeful son finally arrived was, that the non-admittance of the latter could not by any possibility be attributed to any want of ability on his part, that was entirely out of the question. In all likelihood the porter had been suborned by some deadly personal enemy, perhaps Sandy Wylie, to smudge his drawing or distort his outline: or more probably, the Academicians themselves were jealous of the great rising talent he displayed, and afraid to admit amongst their younger fry one who so positively promised to eclipse all their own hard-toiled-for glory. In no other equally rational manner could this astonishing decision be accounted for. The fact, however, had such a depressing effect upon both, for the time being, that Mr. Widge found himself under the pressing necessity of fetching, with his own hand, out of his own private cellar (which was always kept under lock and key) a couple of his very best bottles of golden sherry, wherewith to restore the tone at once of his feelings and his stomach. For an hour or two Gabriel could not bear to think of the expense he had been at; he inwardly denounced the arts as mere childish fiddle-faddle, and openly swore that artists, musicians, actors, and tailors, were the most envious, jealous-pated rascals under the sun. As the wine vanished, however, he began to regard them with something more of an eye of favor, and before he rolled off to bed, about midnight, his waking visions of Launcelot's future glory were as bright as ever.

"Don't feel like a cockrel with your comb cut, my boy," was his parting injunction. "Stick to your pudding, Launcey, and rise like a Phoenix fire-office from your ashes."

"Oh, d——n the academy!" exclaimed Launcelot (his father did not like to hear him swear, but generously permitted him to do so on this special occasion); "I'll not condescend to try again, but go straight off to the British Museum!"

"Hurray, my boy, that's your spirit! Plenty of rael antikes there, and them gentlemen with long sticks, can instruct you, I dare say, quite as well as Mister Fuzzlezy."

And so concluding, with a last good night, our heroes retired to their pillows.

Launcelot found it much easier to gain admittance into the sculpture rooms of the Museum, than into the antique school of that aristocratic place, the Royal Academy. He now resolved to prove to the world that the members of that body did not know what they were about when, so unluckily for their own reputation, they rejected *him*. He should still live to show them that great artists could arise from the common soil without their walls, as well as in the hot-beds within them. He felt assured the time would arrive, and that at no far distant day, when they would court his acceptance of an associate's chair preparatory to inveigling him into that of an academician, or perhaps of the president himself. Would not he be revenged *then*?—just remind them of his vain application as a student, and tell them that, as they had once refused him, through their own folly, they would have to whistle a long while now before they brough him to! "Old birds isn't caught with chaff," thought he; "and they'll find I'm too old for them at last."

Young Widge very soon found himself wonderfully at home in his new situation. The "Museumites," as the students in that national repository are technically termed, were generally of his own stamp—powerful but unfortunate geniuses, interspersed here and there with a slight sprinkling of tolerably clever fellows; and although his father still continued to pay for his education at Mr. Griesback's study, the latter soon grew into a mere visiting place, while the Museum, that cost nothing, was all in all. His acquaintances rapidly extended there, and not a month had elapsed before he had established himself as the ringleader in playing all kinds of jokes upon the wide-mouthed country bumpkins and red-faced misses, who came to stare at the "zoights."

Whenever visitors of this description chanced to ask any of the students a question, it was an understood thing that they should regularly be referred to Launcy, as being far better able than any one else in the galleries to satisfy their inquisitive minds. Launce always appeared to be remarkably busy, as indeed he was, though rather in ogling pretty girls, staring at bashful ones, and in quizzing yellow top-boots, corduroy breeches, and country-cut coats, than in attending to his drawing. No sooner was an application for information made to Mr.

Widge, than he kindly descended from his tier of wooden boxes, laid down his crayon, and tipping a wink to his associates, with a grave and polite air volunteered to give all the information in his power. The bust of Homer, he described as that of a celebrated shoemaker to his late majesty, who, as a matter of eccentricity, allowed his beard to grow in the manner there represented, in order that, in the practice of his profession, he might never be entirely destitute of bristles. The Egyptian sarcophagi, he represented as the work, in red putty, of an eminent London glazier; and the mummies, as a number of old ladies and gentlemen, supposed to be ancient Britons, who had been dug out of the earth when a large sewer was being made down White-chapel. The discobulus, he said, was a portrait of the notorious Jack Smellie, playing at quoits in the back-yard of the "Pig and Whistle;" and the drunken faun, he referred to as the same individual, after he had one night won a bet of three gallons of ale.

The more implicitly Launcelot could make his tales believed, the greater gusto did the fun thereby created possess, though not unfrequently he very narrowly escaped betrayal by the almost ungovernable tittering of his delighted accomplices.

In this manner were the days of public admission generally spent. But on "private days," when the students were unhappily cut off from practicing this sort of facetiousness, they amused themselves by spending the first hour in arranging boxes and determining the best points of sight; the next, in the production of a rude outline, duly acquired by dint of a small plumb-line and piece of a penny loaf to rub out with. By this time an adjournment became necessary, and the select band accordingly took up their hats, and retired to some neighboring tavern, for the consumption of a chop each or a dish of steaks, abundantly moistened with pots of brown stout, and wound up with a cigar and a "go" of spirituous liquor. Thus refreshed, they returned to chat away another hour or two with the female students; then to criticise and crack jokes upon one another's drawings; then to discussing such subjects as usually form the staple commodity of idle young gentlemen of this description, not unfrequently illustrated by marginal sketches on their drawing-boards; and at last to a few minutes serious application to work, in order to find ground for persuading themselves that they had not been idle, until the welcome, hollow voice of the worthy keeper echoed along the galleries, "Dime do klause!" (which, when translated, means

"Time to close") forewarned them that four o'clock was nigh at hand. Innumerable boxes and drawing-boards were then gladly put away, and our industrious students hurried off to the more agreeable work of the dinner-table.

Launcelot was delighted to find himself at length fairly introduced amongst such a society of artists of his own way of thinking; as were they on their side equally to receive such a valuable addition to their company as Widge undoubtedly was, seeing that his pocket-money was always sufficiently abundant, and his notions of domestic economy not a whit less liberal. To be sure, his worthy father sometimes looked rather grave at Launcy's expenditure, but that agreeable youth soon satisfied him upon the point, by demonstrating that though he went to the theatre or the opera nearly every night, it was more to study action and character than because he wanted to see a play; and that when he attended the pretty-frequently-held meetings of his cronies, the Museumites, it was with the laudable intention of discoursing about art and artists, and thus improving his mind, not with any view of converting into principal objects the mere accessories of wine, cigars, and an occasional song or two, which were necessary to keep the genius from growing dull and rusty, by lying too long in one and the same scabbard.

CHAPTER XV.

LAUNCELOT TAKETH HIS PLEASURE AT "HANNAH'S" IN RUPERT-STREET, AND FINDETH GREAT DELIGHTS IN THE SOCIETY OF MR. STRETCHER.

It is the peculiar faculty of great geniuses, like elastic balls, to rebound the more, the more forcibly they are thrown down. When the time again came round for sending probationers' drawings to the academy, Mr. L. Widge had so far overcome his animosity against, and contemptuous disrespect of, that august body, as to be prevailed upon to transmit another drawing for its approbation. The fact was, Launce had argued himself into the singular conclusion that the academy might, by a possibility, manage to do much better without him than he, on the other hand, could do without it. He began to think it would still remain in existence even should he valiantly persist in withholding his support,

as he had once determined to do; while, if he could succeed in associating his name therewith, even in the humble capacity of student of the antique school, it might have its effects in stamping him as a legitimate artist, and enabling him to pass current where, otherwise, he might run the same risk as a bad shilling, and get refused.

Accordingly he sent; and, we are delighted to record, this time received his ivory ticket for ten years, and free admission to the yearly exhibitions. However, as he made a point of being generous to the porter, on his admission, and presented him with half a guinea, he did not gain much touching this last item, in the matter of economy. No sooner was his elevation made known at home, than his father Gabriel flew into ecstasies. Hé pronounced the Academy one of the finest institutions in the world, an honor to his native country, and the mother of English art; while the members thereof themselves, were every one worthy of a place amongst the best names of the "Biographical Dictionary." As for Launcelot, nothing now was too much to do for him in the way of his profession, and to help him forwards towards his final destiny of an enviable manhood and a great name.

One night, as Launce was sitting cosily by the fireside, in a snug room at "Hannah's," in Rupert street, discussing tumblers of toddy, and dispensing principles into thin air, along with his especial friends, Mr. Sapio Green, vulgarly called Sap Green, Mr. McGilp, and Mr. Stretcher, the latter demanded of him,

"I say, Widge, you're big enough to do without your mother, now; how comes it you don't set up an establishment of your own? Upon my honor you'd feel yourself supremely more comfortable and independent. Private lodgings for me, I say—bachelor's hall—nobody to interfere with you—no askings what time you got home last night—latch-key when you go out—drop in just what hour you please, late or early—you do the whole thing spicy, and in first rate, slap-up-style!"

"Just the thing, no doubt," replied Launcy. "I have been thinking that matter over to myself some time ago" (it had never entered his head before that moment); "what might a fit place for me stand in the way of damages?"

"Well—hum—arr—you'd get a tolerable place, such as you *might* manage with, and perhaps be supremely comfortable in, comparatively speaking, for the trifle of a couple or three guineas a-week. The old boy's not stinging, is he?"

"Avast there, lubber!" exclaimed Syppa

Green, "I know a lady who has a place in Newman-street—artists' quarters, painting-room, bed-room, and cupboard to dress in, all complete, to let at this time for forty shillings; and I dare say five-and-thirty might take 'em."

"Recollect, Widge," said Stretcher, "how much oftener we could favor you with our company than we can now at these confounded public places! Can't run out the whole line here, nohow! get a snug place of your own tap—select your own cigars, and don't be obliged to consume Covent-garden cabbage leaves like these; furnish a flare-up painting-room, as if you meant doing something, and just let the world see there was no fool come from heaven when you dropp'd in!"

"Prime dew, this," remarked Mr. McGilp, "I'd advise you, Widge, to get in a few gallons of the same, ready for us when we come to welcome you to your new lodgings. By the bye, what capital lobsters they have about Oxford-street!"

"Is the lady you mentioned," interrupted Stretcher, and addressing Sap, "much of a genius at steaks and oyster sauce?"

"Well, I can't say," replied Sap. "It was not mentioned in the advertisement, but you can go along with Widge to-morrow, and ask her personally, if you like."

"Of course I shall!" exclaimed Stretcher, "you don't suppose I would allow any friend of mine to stultify himself to such an extent as to take apartments anywhere where the lady couldn't do steaks and oysters supremely fine! Whose stout do they sell in that neighborhood?"

All this was considered so remarkably brilliant, that the four friends burst into a simultaneous laugh, which at first subsided with a degree of precision in point of time, equal to that of any amateur chorus; but was renewed again in occasional and unlooked-for explosions from one or other of the party, as the wit thereof sunk deeper into their minds.

"Say ten o'clock to-morrow, Launce," observed Mr. Stretcher, "we'll just take a nip before we start, and then I'll do myself the pleasure of walking with you to Newman-street. You've no fear of the old boy, of course? Make him riddle out his dust, just for the credit of the profession, you know. Tell him nobody would think of going to an oilman's shop to have a portrait painted and especially in Martin's lane. An artist must make a figure or he's nowhere. Stick that right into him up to the handle, and I'm bless'd if he don't come down with the needful forthwith! But you know the cue, my boy, so *ruf sed*, as Jonathan has it. Well, as we've settled this

matter so amicably, suppose we screw up for a song; what say you Widge, agreed?—all right, Sap? Mix in the chorus M'Gilp; here goes!" and as Stretcher leaned back in his chair, so he roared out the following:

THE GIPSIES BOLD.

I.

Oh! a jolly crew, with nought to do,
Are we who ramble the greenwood through;
Whether in smiles the sky looks down,
Or wears on his face a cloudy frown;
Whether the winds blow hot or cold,
Oh! a jolly crew are the gipsies bold.

II.

Though a king have we, we all are free,
Man, woman, and child, as good as he!
Should the monarch frown, we fillip him down,
And put on another the gipsy's crown.
Oh! a jolly crew, with nought to do.
Are we who ramble the greenwood through.

III.

One blessing, at least, we keep no priest;
We fast when we must—when we can, we feast;
We laugh at all tales monk artifice tells,
And believe his own conscience the worst of all
hells!
Oh! a jolly crew, &c.

IV.

No chancellor have we to count our gold,
But each keeps as much as his pocket doth hold;
Since a maxim we take it, by kettle and pot,
No man's pocket doth hold any more than he's
got.
Then join in my chorus, man, woman, and child;
Sing 'Hurrah! for the life of the gipsy wild!'
Oh! a jolly crew, &c.

"There, isn't that slap?—spicy—tip-top, and no mistake? Now, Sappy, you're called on for a song. Give mouth, man; only have a care of your epiglottis; and be sure to open your safety-valve, if you happen to get your steam too high. Shouldn't like to see you blow up, and scatter your splinters, old codfish."

"Well, I hate hesitation," remarked Sap, "so here goes for a dive."

YOUNG GUIDO THE PAINTER.

I.

Young Guido the painter his canvass stretch'd
And spread out his pigments finely,
Then on it in charcoal a Cupid stretch'd
And color'd it most divinely.
"May the damsel," said he, "who shall thee
possess
Live long, the life of the painter to bless!"

II.

And the picture he placed in the portico
Of a ruin'd old temple in Greece;
But while thousands came to admire the show
Not one of them bid for the piece;
Till a maid and her father by chance came there
And the damsel purchased the picture rare!

• III.

"Oh, father! this looks not the work of man's hand—
Though it must be, I fancy," quoth she,
"It marvels me greatly, as here we stand,
What manner of man he can be."
And the painter came from a column near
And knelt him low to that lady fair!

IV.

Young Guido now paces in halls deck'd finely,
Or sits in moonshine with the maid apart,
And blesses the day that he drew so divinely
The Cupid that won him her heart.
While Joy, whom he never once painted at all,
Spreads her beautiful light on each palace wall!

"Now, Launcelot Widge, Esquire," cried
Stretcher, "tip us a stave about as long as
Field Lane, will you? and don't let the
lamp out for want of snuffing."

"Don't sing and won't sing—can't sing
and shan't sing," answered the individual
addressed.

"Conclusive, very," rejoined Stretcher,
"and remarkably epigrammatic. What
whetstone were you sharpened on last?
I suppose the magic 'strap' has had some-
thing to do with it, eh? Well, well, all
right, my top-knot. No damage sustained
at present."

Were the truth desirable, we should at
once admit that our jovial party had wan-
dered considerably beyond the singing point,
and though possessed with an ardent desire
to be doing something, yet scarcely knew
what they should be at. All at least except
Mr. Stretcher, who had contracted such a
long and intimate acquaintance with the
bottle, that seldom indeed was it the two
disagreed with each other.

"Come," at length he added, stretching
his arms and legs straight out like the two
sides of a ladder, "I'll just do another my-
self to keep your eyelids up, and then we'll
be off home. It's near twelve now, and we
shall have to be up by ten to-morrow
morning."

Mr. Stretcher drank half a tumbler of
today, and began—

THE DEMON SHARK.

I.

A calm fell on the ocean,
The ship stood still at sea,

No wavy track lay at her back,
No foam upon her lee.
Full ten good fathoms downward
Man's eye might pierce the deep,
All life seem'd dead, the air like lead,
And Death himself asleep!

II.

So it was all the weary day,
But ere came down the dark,
A seaman's cry was heard on high,
"He comes!—the demon shark!"
From out the twilight bottom
We saw the monster rise,
A living grave amid the wave,
A grave with hellish eyes!

III.

He came to gape for corpses;
For in his caverns dim
Fierce Fever's voice he heard rejoice
And bid a feast for him.
So one by one in hammocks,
With shot to sink them low,
A pray'r was said above the dead,
And then we let them go!

IV.

Down went the corpses one by one,
Down, down, into the dark,
And after them more fierce than death,
Sunk down the demon shark.
Our hearts were fill'd with hatred,
For ere the sun had set
A bloody coil began to boil
Up from the depths of jet!

V.

At night we heard a rushing
As of wind amid the wave,
It was the monster gambolling
Upon our seamen's grave.
So we took another body
And hurl'd it in the main,
But never more along that shore
Saw we the Shark again!

"Good night, gentlemen," exclaimed
Stretcher, "ten o'clock to-morrow, Widge
—right hand parlor, corner of Caroline
street. Find me there, my boy. Well,
good night, good night, and God bless you."

Thus they parted at the door; Lance
towards St. Martin's Lane, and Stretcher
in the direction of Tottenham-court Road,
while Sappy and M'Gilp remained behind
to wind up with another glass or two, of
which, the next day, their recollections
were perfectly innocent.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECORDS HOW LANCE FLEW TO ANOTHER'S ASSISTANCE AND THEN REQUIRED ASSISTANCE HIMSELF—A SURGEON, A SERJEANT OF MARINES, AND A BATTLE AT MR. CHUCKCHIN'S.

LAUNCELOT had not been in his room many minutes, the family having all retired to rest long before, ere a loud and impassioned knocking at the street door suddenly half frightened him out of his wits, and caused him to spring out of bed, put on his dress, and hurry down stairs, in order to see what was the matter, the weary attendant of the kitchen who had let him in having retired to her couch underneath the dresser. Ere he could withdraw the many bolts, bars, and chains which his worthy parent considered needful for the due security of himself and property, the knocking was repeated, and accompanied with very audible sobs, and groans, and incoherent exclamations of a nature so terrific, that Lance half doubted the propriety of opening the door until he had first held an explanatory parley through the aperture of the keyhole. The seeming emergency of the case, however, would not permit of this, and especially as the voice—that of a woman—was familiar to him as far as his bewildered fancy could be trusted for its report, and it uttered besides in strong accents the name of Mr. Widge.

Our hero flung the door back; Miss Amelia Chuckchin fell into his arms, and in the next instant the wind blew out the candle, and left the young couple in this interesting situation in the dark. Lance closed and locked the door, and then called lustily on the no less lusty Betsy for assistance; but before that could be rendered, his father, Gabriel, was down upon them in the dark. Having been awakened by the noise, he had hastily slipped on a large flannel dressing-gown, and thinking that there were thieves on the premises, rushed headlong down stairs, stick in hand, laying about him at random amidst the almost palpable blackness as laboriously as might a country thresher over a task of corn. In this process he demolished half-a-dozen of Lancy's casts on the staircase, shivered the hall lamp to atoms, floored a whole peg-board full of hats, and would have done still heavier, because more bodily damage, had not his weapon got entangled in the armhole of a great-coat, and thus been arrested suddenly in its destructive career.

By this time Betsy had raised a light, and hurrying up the kitchen steps found Lancy supporting the now fainting Miss Chuck-

chin, while Mr. Widge, senior, in his pointed cotton night-gown and *robe de chambre*, stood amazedly by, with his "jolly nose" bleeding sadly, he having had the misfortune to wound it with his own stick in his desperate attempts to annihilate the imaginary intruders upon his midnight domains. Miss Amelia's first words were, "My father, oh, my father! He's kill'd, he's kill'd!" and then she swooned again, as a young lady ought to swoon, into the arms of Mr. Widge's easy chair.

On hearing this dismal intelligence, Lance rushed off in the direction of Long Acre, leaving his father leaning over a wash-basin and Betsy attending to the lady. The whole house was by this time raised, and crowded into the room anxiously inquiring into the cause of all this uproar. While Miss Chuckchin was making various ineffectual efforts to give all needful explanations, Lancy had cleared the streets with the rapidity of a poodle in a hurry, and presented himself at the private door of her father's house. On entering, he found Miss Josephine weeping like the dropping well at Knaresborough, and all the while endeavoring, with the assistance of the maid, to pour a little cordial between the livid lips of an aged and white-haired corpse, as it seemed, that lay frightfully battered at the foot of the staircase. Lance had never seen such a sight before, and it made his hair stand on end; he leaned against the wall, and in the next moment dropped all of a heap apparently as dead as his friend the pawnbroker.

What might have ensued in the double dilemma we can scarcely predict, had not very fortunately two or three of the elder Masters Widge just then rushed in, followed by a large upright bundle of great coat and comforters, which contained in its core a very small watchman. He was a Charley of the old sort, and compounded of course of the least given amount of man with the largest moveable quantity of clothing. He had also a cough which seemed to have lain and rusted so long, and been so repeatedly encrusted with new layers of fog, that its original configuration was all but lost, and it now bore a striking resemblance in sound to the wheezing asthmatic bark of a retired poodle.

"Put him to bed," said the nose of this gentleman, as it peeped through an interval between his hat-brim and his neckerchief, "worm worter, I tell you, and then run off for the surjent."

These first orders were promptly obeyed, and one of the Widges was hurried away post-haste to execute the latter. We have said the junior Widges were all blockheads:

Jehosaphat was the very essence of them ; for instead of running to the first red and blue lamp, he scampered off in the direction of the Horse Guards ; but happening to encounter a drunken "serjeant" of marines crossing Charing-cross, he thanked Providence for its interposition, and hurried the soldier with him back to Long Acre, the man of war declaring most emphatically all the way that he was always ready for duty at the call of female loveliness in distress. Jehosaphat, however, had been gone so long upon his errand that the proper "surjent" had arrived before him, and was attending to the bleeding of Mr. Chuckchin, when he entered arm-in-arm with the serjeant of marines. The latter no sooner set eyes upon the crowd, whom he supposed to be in a state of rebellion against the king, his crown and dignity, than he drew his sword, and throwing himself into a fighting attitude whirled it furiously around his own person, and within an ace of some of their ears, swearing vengeance and ten thousand devils against the whole company, unless they cleared the house in less than no time. The timorous individuals thus threatened, flew in all directions ; the maid ensconcing herself behind the barrier of a washstand, Lance (who had by this time been recovered by the help of half-a-pint of brandy and water), sought refuge under the bed, while Miss Josephine, in attempting to fly through the doorway, was caught by the man of valor and severely kissed, with many assurances of safety and support so long as he had a sword to wield and an arm hanging to his body. Jehosaphat, the watchman, and the surgeon alone maintained their ground ; the former regarding the countenance of the able assistant he had procured, with a remarkable expression of satisfaction, and the latter working Mr. Chuckchin's arm like the lever of a low pressure engine in order to force, if possible, an additional quantity of the reluctant fluid from his veins. Every now and then, however, he begged the soldier to keep quiet and listen to reason ; but the latter courageously consigned all reason to very sulphurous quarters, and swore that while blood was being shed before his very face, argument was all humbug, and neither could nor should be listened to, saying which he thrust Jehosaphat aside with his left hand, and jumping into an attitude, presented the point of his weapon full at the surgeon, whom he took to be prime aggressor, and twisted it rapidly half round and back again as though already gouging a respectable hole through that peaceful individual's body. In vain did the latter, seeing his jeopardy, call on the detachment

of Widges to seize upon the madman and disarm him ; those cautious grenadiers felt it would be as much as their lives were worth to venture on such an experiment, and accordingly only sought the more effectually to secure themselves as the danger in view became every moment more imminent.

At length the fearful thrust was made ; the surgeon dexterously slipped aside, and the serjeant fell violently to the floor, burying his sword in a chest of drawers. The surgeon instantly was down upon him, and calling loudly for a bandage, bled him immediately, *secundum artem*, in order to effect the reduction of his raging fever with the least possible delay. At first it required all the force that could be mustered to keep him in contact with the boards ; he kicked and flung, and raged like a maniac, declaring they were a pack of cowardly Frenchmen, a hang-dog set of rascals, that deserved to be flogged to the bare backbone, and then to be put into ham pickle for the next following fortnight. This fury, however, soon subsided ; his face grew terrifically white and dough like, and he changed his note of defiance to a rational request for a cup of water. This was supplied him, his arm was bandaged up, and shortly afterwards he was conducted into the street with a caution to keep his own counsel and beware of drawing weapons again upon the civilians of the land, lest on another occasion matters should not fare quite so tolerably with him as upon the present.

Peace being somewhat restored, it was now discovered that Mr. Chuckchin had not really as yet departed this life, although he appeared close upon the point of so doing ; and as his return to sensation allowed time for inquiry, Miss Josephine was requested to state, as far as she knew, the cause of this unheard of disaster. Accordingly that highly interesting member of the sex proceeded to relate how, as she and her sister were chatting over the looking glass, a tremendous fall was heard from the upper story, all down stairs, conveying the involuntary idea that all the pledges stored away above had suddenly conspired to break prison and had rushed in a dusty and frowy phalanx at one headlong leap from head to foot of the staircase. After a few moments' hesitation they rushed out, and to their horror discovered their venerated progenitor coiled round on the mat below more like a large dog than a laboring Christian. It was a peculiar habit of her father's, she added, to explore the whole house at the very last hour previously to retiring to rest, for the purpose of assuring himself against hidden thieves, fire, rats, and night-moths, of which latter he had entertained especial horror ever since the day that a whole great coat had been swallowed up by them, and two lady's

shawls from the neighborhood of Bow-street been victimized beyond reparation. This interesting young lady still further informed her eager audience that Mr. Chuckchin had that evening been supping with his friend Gabriel Widge, and had probably taken a "leetle" more than his accustomed potations. An incident that might probably have led to a slip on the stairs and his subsequent plunge to the bottom.

All this appeared so probable, that every hearer at once gave in to its belief; and in that belief would probably have continued to the end of time, had not a few of them subsequently gone up stairs to examine the downward course of this living meteor, and there unexpectedly discovered the top story nearly emptied of its valuables, the skylight open, and various scraps and rags hanging about the aperture, as if to mark the direction in which the emigrant property had taken its flight. The first daring spirit who ventured on to the roof, shot back again with the rapidity of an arrow, and reported that a very tall, thin man, with a very long neck and square shoulders, was even now standing, as bold as Hector, on the very ridge of the house, just outside, smoking his pipe most furiously, and apparently as unconcerned at the danger of his situation, as though, instead, he were planted on solid granite in the very middle of Long Acre itself! This astounding news carried fear to every heart except that of the small watchman, who no sooner heard the news than he walked out of the portable box formed by his coats, strongly conveying the idea of a diminutive kernel just extracted from an enormous shell, and scrambled up to arrest the bold faced vagabond as his prisoner. On reaching the ridge, however, and requesting the rascal to surrender, he found that the object of alarm was no other than a very peaceably disposed, though somewhat hungry looking, chimney, with an old soot bag hung on it, and an equally old hat stuck on the pot, by way of scarecrow; the pipe he was supposed to be smoking being no other than a brother flue, that just then happened to be doing service in carrying away the vapor from Mr. Chuckchin's bed room fire place. This second alarm over, strict search was made for the thieves; but it proved ineffectual; as well, indeed, it might; for at that very time they were safely ensconced in a back room in the court behind, glorying in the success of their exploit, and disposing of the spoil.

The case now seemed clear enough; Mr. Chuckchin had been thrown down stairs, and the probability of murder been committed as well as robbery. Luckily, however, for a correct understanding of this intricate case, the pawnbroker himself recovered sufficiently in the course of a few hours, to assure his children and attendants that he had never been touched by the intruders; that the accident was

owing to a slip of his own, arising from his economical practice of wearing very miserable slippers; and that he should like the lawyer and the divine to be sent for, as he wished to make his will, and his peace with Heaven. These requests were immediately complied with; and, after all arrangements had been made, he died about daylight.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAUNCELOT MAKES LOVE TO MISS AMELIA CHUCKCHIN, THROWS HIS FATHER INTO ECSTASIES, AND PROJECTS A FAMOUS JOURNEY INTO THE COUNTRY.

THERE was great grief, at first, in Mr. Chuckchin's house, after the catastrophe just related. Whether death seize a peer or a pawnbroker, little difference is felt in the realization. The region round about where the corpse lies seems changed, and no longer to breathe the breath of common life to living souls. The mighty Presence everlastingly, as with the ceaseless voice of a spiritual ocean in the brain, seems to utter aloud, "I am here!" Day and night we hear it, while the mysterious frame that once held a living and present visitant from other worlds, yet lies in its last abandonment within the same wall with us; and only then, when the earth has called back her own, do we begin to feel that the dark wings of the invisible Terror are spread to pass away from above us.

But the Misses Chuckchin had felt all this, and a great deal more, once before, when their mother died; and perhaps that might be some reason why they somewhat earlier subdued their grief on the present occasion. True enough their departed father had lived upon very plain commons ever since his widowhood; he had displayed what some people might consider too much parsimony, about the young ladies' dresses and decorations. But what then? Was even this enough to mow down a church-yard mound, and level the resting-place of a passed traveller for ever with the common earth? "Forbid it, Heaven!" exclaimed the two young ladies in their hearts, as they applied, with tearful eyes, to Mr. Gabriel Widge (who was left sole executor) for an abundant supply of cash, wherewith to furnish suitable mourning for themselves; and although neither of them cared a pin's head for what it was they should wear on this mournful occasion, luck would have it that their garments should be of the richest material, and of the most approved and fashionable make. Indeed, they had never been known to look so smart, and interesting, during the whole course of their previous lives.

"Launcy," said Gabriel one day to his son, after he had taken a private peep into the will of the deceased, "you are old enough now to know what's what, and I feel anxious you should not show any neglect, my boy, to either of them two Long-Acre orfins; they're remarkable nice gals, both of them; and if I aint much mistaken, either Jossy or Mealy would fly into raptures to have you. They're a large fortin a-piece, and will very soon get swallered up by somebody or other, depend on it. Try 'em both, my boy, and suit yourself; but your father Gabriel rather fancies you'll find Mealy the most insinivating of the two. Either 'll do, however—jist which suits your own fancy best; but at the same time, I know Mealy admires your genius greatly, for I've heered her say so more nor once."

"I want none of your wimmin," exclaimed Launcelot, "coddling and bothering about me. Artists as means to be artists, never gets married, I tell you. Michael Angelo was a bachelor all his life; and what a rum sort of a sound it would have had, to hear any body asking about Miss Angelo and a houseful of babbies. Catch me at that, if you can—no Missis Widge for me—I'm married to painting, as they say, and that is all about it."

Mr. Gabriel, somewhat vexed and puzzled too, as he dreaded anything that might hang upon his son's skirts, and hamper his ascent to the house of Fame, was beating his brains for a rejoinder, when a familiar tap was heard at the door, and Miss Amelia Chuckchin herself entered the room. Gabriel hastily crammed the will into his pocket, and pretending business down below, bade the young couple remain a few minutes until his return; at the same time, as he thought, winking at Launcy, by way of hint, what he was to be at; although we are bound to record that it was wholly lost upon the pleasing youth, whose whole attention just then happened to be absorbed in an attempted repetition of a curious experiment with the fire-tongs, which he had seen practised repeatedly by his friend Stretcher, without his being able hitherto to find it out.

"Fine day, Mr. Launcelot," said Amelia, very languidly.

"Slap up weather," replied Launcy—"did you ever see this trick with the tongs?"

"Oh no, indeed!—Is it very interesting?"

"Well, miss, I fancy it is, to them as likes it; but, for my part, I can't come it nohow, try as long as I will."

"Then I should think, Mr. Launcelot, the best way would be to put the tongs down, and—and—amuse yourself some other way. Oh, dear! you would wonder what I sighed for, Mr. Launcelot, if you did not know how miserable I feel."

"Oh! hang all that, Mealy," replied Launce; "what is the use of piping your eye

now? Flare up a bit, and look about you, and you'll soon forget all about the old gentleman. Besides, you know, my father will take care of you both just as well as he could if he'd lived ten years longer."

"Yes, I know he will do all he can, godd soul; but then, Mr. Launcelot, you know as well as I do that he cannot last for ever any more than any body else—it is not like as though he was a *younger* protector, Mr. Launcelot."

Miss Amelia sighed, and took her seat on the sofa near her pleasing companion, as she remarked, in a more tender tone,

"Now, don't you seriously think, Mr. Launcelot, that I have wasted away very much lately?" at the same time slightly extending towards him, with the back upwards, a very pretty-shaped and plump white hand, adorned with four irresistible dimples in the place of the knuckles, the nails as clean and delicate as the inside of a pearl oyster-shell, and two of the four fingers richly laden with costly rings out of the shop—the former boast of some now unknown young lady, in her day of pride, and her support, perhaps, afterwards in the hour of distress. But, inasmuch as reflections of this last nature never troubled Launcelot's fancy, or intruded to spoil his pleasure, he looked on it all just as it came, and taking the tips of Miss Amelia's fingers in his own, examined their delicate form with the eye of a connoisseur, as he pronounced the hand not a shade too thin, but fully equal to the restored hands of the Medician Venus herself.

"Oh, Mr. Launcelot!" exclaimed Amelia, throwing down her dark eyes, "you know I am alone in the world now!—I am, indeed,—I feel I am!"

Launce was not a hard-hearted boy, and concluding that a kiss in time *might* possibly stay a few tears, while it could not in its very nature do any material damage, courageously seized Miss Amelia round the neck and saluted her several times. All this while Mr. Gabriel Widge's head might have been seen by any body else except the young couple themselves, poked through the partially opened door, and overspread with a smile of delight and satisfaction against which that of Joe Miller's self is sheer solemnity. But when the kisses came to pass, Gabriel felt as though he had swallowed a whole barometer of quicksilver—he seemed literally to be lifted off his feet and carried through the air as buoyantly as a thistle down. He bounced into the room crying, "Hencore! go it, my boy!—that's the ticket!—never mind, Mealy," and uttering other similar exclamations, while he danced about the carpet in a perfect ecstasy of delight, after which he suddenly decamped.

"I can never, for shame, see you again, Mr.

Launcelot," at length whispered the young lady, "I am sure if my own sister had told me I could not have believed you were half so rude."

"Nonsense, Mealy!" replied Launce. "You like it, you know you do, so say no more about it."

"Well, upon my word! you are very plain to-day, sir. But I can assure you, Mr. Launcelot, that if we were not like cousins more than anything else, I should never allow such liberties to be taken with me. I pardon you this once, however, if you will never offend again."

"Can't promise!" cried Launce, "for I find it's no use. I did once say I'd never buy any more strawberries in pottles again, because I once got cheated with a lot of old mash'd uns plated with fresh, but I always do when I meet a pretty clean young girl a-selling em, notwithstanding."

"Oh, dear, do you know—there, now, what a forgetful creature I am! I almost forgot to tell you, Mr. Launcelot that we have had an invitation to spend some weeks in the country at a particular friend's of my dear father's. His lady writes such a beautiful letter, quite affecting, I assure you, but I am hesitating about accepting the invitation, because you see we have no gentlemen friends to accompany us. It would look so odd, I think for us to go down to that lonely place without company of any kind; people would be sure to say some ill-natured things or other, for those country places are made up of nothing but scandal. Besides, all the men wear blue frocks, and talk about nothing but clay, and wheat, and cows, and horses. I really think I should die of the melancholy in a week."

"Don't you think my father might beau you down?" asked Launcy, "he's plenty fashionable enough for such a place as that, and would make good sport too, for I think he ain't been more than ten miles out of London above twice in his life. I should like to go with you if he went. *Wouldn't we keep him lively!*"

"Yes, now," replied Amelia, "why cannot you go as you say; I should not mind it with you half so much."

"No, I know that," answered the youth, "but what sort of a time should I have of it, do you think, with Mealy on one side and Jossey on the other, all day long? Why it would all be, Launcy do this, and Launcy do that, and Launcy oh do pull me some of them blackberries down, and Launcy get me some apples; and all such as that, till I should be obliged to run back home again, or else drown myself in the horse-pond. No, no, Mealy, old birds is not catched with chaff? Get my father to go, and then I'm ready."

By this time dinner was placed upon Mr Widge's table, and the servant was despatched

to Long Acre for Miss Jossey, while Gabriel himself, decked in a bran new pair of black kerseymere shorts, with half-mourning waist-coat and coat to match, entered the room to request this agreeable couple to adjourn to the table.

"All close, Mealy. my dear," said Gabriel, "close as wax. Nobody knows but me. Don't be bashful now, for you know I'm your father now, you hussy, you do! Come, Launcy, take Mealy's arm and lead her to dinner."

Our hero took her arm, and marched off, whispering to her on the way to be sure and coax the "old un" to go with them into the country, and then he'd show them some fun worth laughing at.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAUNCELOT MEETS AN OLD FRIEND ON THE STAGE COACH, AND INTRODUCES HIM TO THE COUNTRY PARTY — MR. STRETCHER CATCHES A GLIMPSE OF A WIFE AND FORTUNE.

So delighted was Mr. Gabriel Widge with the recent events, that on sitting down to the table we verily believe he would have granted anything that Miss Amelia might have asked, even to the half—if not of his kingdom exactly, yet of his worldly goods and chattels. Little difficulty therefore was experienced in winning the old gentleman to give his consent to accompany the two young ladies and Launcelot on their proposed country visit.

Not more than a week had elapsed—a busy week in washings up, and trunk preparing, and all the other nameless et ceteras that combine to make happy bodies singularly industrious previous to a journey—when early one morning, two hackney coaches rumbled up St. Martin's lane, and stopped before Mr. Widge's door. The passage was crowded with boxes of all varieties, four umbrellas sociably tied together were reared up in the corner, along with two new first-rate fishing rods—one for Gabriel and one for Launce—the make of the far famed Chevalier of Bell-yard, Temple-bar. For although, as Mr. Widge, senior frankly declared, he had never tried to catch a fish during the whole course of his life, yet he was fully resolved to do so on the present occasion, and have every one he should hook properly prepared and varnished, as specimens of the piscatorial natural history of his own native land.

Breakfast had been prepared at an almost supernatural hour, in order that the party might not run any danger by sallying forth upon

the cold, early air, with empty stomachs; but no one displayed any appetite except for the journey, and Launcelot evinced his perfect detestation of such an unseasonable meal, by qualifying his tea with old Jamaica, and then blowing a cigar in size scarcely inferior to a long horn carrot. Gabriel would fain have had Launcy and Amelia in the same coach together, but the former very quickly settled the difference by mounting alongside the coachman, for greater convenience of smoking—an act of usurpation which deprived a disappointed cad hard by of a ride to the Cross Keys, and a chat with his professional friend the driver.

Everything being arranged, Gabriel kissed Mrs. Widge in the passage with almost as much enthusiasm as though she had been a neighboring lamp post, and jumping into the coach along with his fair charges, the Misses Chuckchin, ordered the coachman to drive on. Arrived in that narrow, artificial gulley, called Wood-street, they found the stage nearly ready to start; the ladies were hurried inside, the luggage transferred with unexampled rapidity, and then Gabriel tried to get Launcy in before himself, but Launce resisted, on the ground that it would make him ill, to be squeezed up in that horrid little box, and jolted about like a sailor for the next twelve hours. No, no, he preferred the outside, and outside he must go if he meant to arrive at his journey's end anything but a helpless invalid. The fact was, he had discovered his friend, Mr. Stretcher, seated on the top of the coach, and accordingly determined to have a seat beside him.

It must not be supposed that this was the first time, by any means, the two Museumites had met since their parting in Rupert-street. Launcy knew he should find an accomplice on whom he could place implicit faith and reliance, to enable him to carry out his larks and pranks in the country, and at once selected Stretcher as a man exactly modelled for the occasion. He accordingly communicated the whole matter to that worthy, and readily obtained his acquiescence by supplying him with all needful funds for the journey, and promising to introduce him on their arrival in such a manner, that his instantaneous welcome in joining the party should be inevitable. Mr. Stretcher, however, was not such a novice as not to foresee that the venture was worth making on other, and to himself, more important grounds. Having received the whole history of the two Misses Chuckchin from his friend Launcelot, the brilliant thought instantly struck him, that now, if ever, was the time to push his fortune. He thought upon that tide in the affairs of men, which though it must at one time or other rise for all, had never hitherto flowed for him; and at once resolved to exert all his energies in captivating one or other of the two wealthy sisters, no matter which. It

would have been perfectly superfluous, however, on his part, to mention anything of this to Launcelot, and, therefore, just for the fun of the thing, nothing more, he at once avowed his entire willingness to take the very same coach, on the same day, to the same place, on the pretence of a sketching tour, and leave the rest to follow as best it might. With this good understanding, then, between the two conspirators, the whole party at length alighted in a small country town in Leicestershire, having come as far by the ordinary stage-coach as its route permitted. But inasmuch as Fosselthorpe, their final destination, lay some two or three miles down the cross-roads, and a chaise would be needful, Mr. Gabriel Widge at once decided that dinner should be first taken at the inn, and they would conclude their journey in the course of the afternoon. Nothing could have happened better for the interests of Mr. Stretcher, inasmuch as it afforded time not only for the long, warm, and magniloquent introduction with which Launcy accompanied his first interview with his friends, but also, through a necessary invitation to dinner, enabled him to become in a degree familiar with his new acquaintance at the very outset.

Stretcher was just the enterprising spirit to make the most of his opportunity. He cracked jokes with old Widge, patronized all his sayings and absurdities, complimented his extensive knowledge, and actually wondered how, under heaven, it had come to pass that he should have lived so long in the world, and yet have missed becoming, even in spite of himself, a celebrated man. With the ladies he sported a vast fund of delightful small talk, paid each the kindest attentions, incidentally preached a short sermon on the loss of relatives, the horrors of death and damp, clay-cold graves, declared that we were not made to mourn for ever, and concluded with certain poetical allusions to some bright reversion in the sky, which caused Gabriel to look very seriously into his glass of sherry, and the sisters to cast their eyes upwards like two tombstone seraphs. To the party generally he reailed a thick pamphlet of authentic anecdotes, picked up during his own experience, and carefully selected and revised to fit them for family use.

In brief, by the time our party was prepared to set out again, he had gained such standing amongst them, that an invitation to accompany them to Fosselthorpe became unavoidable. Stretcher, however, much to Launcy's astonishment, declined it just then with many thanks, alleging his artistical engagements as too pressing at present, but promising to take a trip over in the course of a few days, and do himsef the supreme pleasure of spending a short time with them.

"Business, you know, Mr. Widge, must be

attended to," said he, shaking the old gentleman's hand as though he was parting with him for life, "but, of course, I need not remind you of that—oh no—a gentleman so deeply versed as you must be in commercial transactions does not require that information. My publisher is a very punctual man. Method, sir, is the very hinge of business, and there is no method without punctuality. Well, friends must part—ta—ta! Hope you will enjoy yourselves till I come! Good afternoon, ladies, and a pleasant ride!" The fellow had the impudence to kiss their hands, but he did it divinely. "Launcelot, my boy, I just want a word with you," and Stretcher drew Launcy up to the gate-post.

"A politic move of mine! you understand it, of course. Don't do to give too large a dose at first, or else, perhaps, get tired of me, d'ye see? Stop at this inn to-morrow over, and then take a walk down next morning. Meantime, you get to know all the ins and outs of the place, and everybody about it, and we'll work the thing slap up!"

Launcy scrambled on to the top of the chaise, waved his hat until they turned the lane corner, and then deliberately smoked cigars at his ease, until their arrival at Mr. Daikin's at Fosselthorpe.

CHAPTER XIX.

GABRIEL WIDGE RECEIVES UNEXPECTED HONORS AND EXALTATION, FOLLOWED BY AS GREAT A FALL—LAUNCY GETS IN A DIFFICULTY, AND WIDOW STIFF FALLS IN LOVE.

MOST industriously did our hero employ the whole of the following day in fulfilling the instructions last given him by his accomplice, Stretcher. He was observed to be remarkably inquisitive about every body and everything, not upon Mr. Daikin's establishment only, but that either nearly or remotely concerned the whole village. At the same time he propagated various romantic stories touching his own venerable parent, representing him not only as a person of title in disguise, but a widower to boot, notwithstanding his own pretensions to being nothing but a common oilman, and having a wife and large family all alive in St. Martin's-lane.

These, he said, were nothing but green blinds which the old gentleman had put up, in order the better to enable himself to judge impartially of the qualifications and dispositions of the various unmarried ladies, into whose society he might enter; as his chief object—although it was kept a great secret—really

was, to select a partner who could be worthy of him, and really love him for his own sake, under the humble appearance of a tradesman, without being enticed into pretensions of affection which she did not feel by the glitter and dignity of his wealth and title. Launcy took good care to impart this information with such an air of confiding artlessness, and at the same time amongst only those parties who enjoyed small chance of ever coming at the real truth of the matter, that it spread with the rapidity of wildfire, improving as it progressed, and gaining credence in proportion to its increase in wonder.

The immediate consequence of this romance proved highly gratifying to Mr. Gabriel Widge, for on taking a walk the following evening, for the purpose of exploring the neighborhood, and "swallowing a mouthful of fresh air," previous to the enjoyment of his after-supper pipe, he found no inconsiderable portion of the inhabitants of Fosselthorpe turned out by their doors, and idling about the causeways, in the vague hope of getting a peep at the mysterious nobleman who was staying on a visit at Mr. Daikin's. As he passed along, the more "respectable" portion of the community, including all the females, cast upon him glances of reverential respect; the bumpings, one and all, touched their hats, and an entire flock of little boys and girls beset his path, one or another of them every now and then shooting a head of him, turning straight round with a bow or a curtsy, and then running hastily out of his way, in order apparently to avoid being run over by him.

Launcy enjoyed all this with silent satisfaction, and the more especially when his father expressed a very strong opinion concerning the natural politeness of the English peasantry, and declared himself most agreeably disappointed in this respect, considering the very contrary impressions he had always hitherto entertained on this score, derived from reading the libellous works of various scurrilous and vulgar authors, of whom Smollett and Fielding were the head and front.

His hopeful son, however, contradicted him as a matter of course, and insisted that the whole thing was to be attributed to his own gentlemanlike appearance, and to the great influence of his new kerseymere shorts, which at once stamped him as a person of no ordinary sort. An assertion too flattering to Gabriel to be broadly denied by him, although the small portion of humility with which nature had provided him rose somewhat in rebellion against such an inference.

On the following morning, Launcelot and the Misses Chuckchin, aided and abetted by Miss Polly Daikin, a romp of fifteen, and her brother Ned, about three years younger, erected a gigantic swing between two apple-trees, in

the grass-grown orchard, and by dint of great persuasions and coaxing, induced Mr. Gabriel Widge to join their innocent and rural sports by taking a seat thereon, and suffering himself to be whirled to and fro like a live pendulum. Very soon the cushion that had been placed underneath, worked itself out, and dropped to the earth, leaving the whole weight of Mr. Widge's ponderous body resting on a foundation no broader than a common clothes-line. In vain he cried out for them to stop; for the louder he bellowed, the greater impetus did Launcy give to the rope every instant that it passed his hand, until, at length, Gabriel described in the air full three-quarters of an immense circle; while his cries were wholly lost amidst the almost hysterical shrieks and laughter of the little crowd below. Anon, his hat flew off, and lodged in the top of an immense pear-tree behind him; then his pocket-book dropped out, and his shoes slipped off; while every time he whirled like a shadow past the earth, huge strings of broken oaths against Launcy swept in terrific gusts upon their ears, and his smiling eyes, so benevolent in their calmer moments, stared madly from their sockets, as ready to start away from the mere action of centrifugal force. Whether he could have sustained this exercise much longer is somewhat doubtful, but at length the rope gave way on a sudden, and Gabriel was pitched over the fence, with a velocity that made all present turn pale with affright. On running to the scene of his fall, however, they found that Providence had happily not been unmindful of him; for, by one of those fortunate circumstances which seem to place mere chance at a considerable discount, he had alighted upon a very high and soft mushroom-bed. Suffice it, however, that his bones were thus, as it were, miraculously preserved, although his celebrated kerseymere shorts suffered so irreparably by the contact, that they immediately became the perquisite of the man who heroically undertook the office of chief-washer to Mr. Widge, after he had been duly placed in the horse-trough for ablutionary purposes. Launcelot endeavored to make all the reparation in his power, by condoling with his parent upon this unfortunate termination to their amusement, and pumping upon him with a degree of spirit and vigor delightful to behold. Nothing, however, seemed equal to the overcoming of Gabriel's wrath; he swore that as soon as ever he had changed his garments, he would horsewhip Launcy round the village; and denounced him as the most incorrigible and graceless rascal that ever unhappy parents were pestered with in this round world.

Our hero found he had brewed a storm in fearful reality; and protested that if people's ropes were rotten, or his father happened to be

unnaturally heavy, he could not help it, it was no fault of his; while, as to the rest, that he, for his part, had been the subject of such a special deliverance, should have thought it his duty to give half-a-crown to the gardener by way of encouragement to future exertion in making mushroom-beds, and then be thankful that nothing worse had come of it, instead of sitting there under a pump-spout, exhibiting a most vindictive and disgraceful spirit, and threatening the very people who were using their utmost exertions to do him good.

"You scoundrel, you!" exclaimed Mr. Widge, senior, "what did you pull for, when you saw I was in an agony to get down?"

"Thought you liked it, 'pa, and was finding fault because we didn't do you faster—wasn't that the fact?"

"Fact, you young villain!" echoed Gabriel, as he snatched furiously at Launcelot's coat-tails which he tore off in the endeavor to secure him; "I'll fact you, as soon as these gen'l'm'n's cleaned me a bit—I'll teach you filial piety, my boy, and no mistake."

"Then, if that's to be it, 'pa," answered Launce, "I'll make a shy bird of myself, and keep out of gun-shot. Never like the company of dangerous customers, so here goes."

Saying which, he ran off at a round trot, and perched himself on the top of a gate-post, where he remained, watching and imitating the movements of his father, to the infinite private gratification of various Hodges then and there assembled.

Scarcely had the elder Mr. Widge conveyed himself into the house, than Launcy received a heavy slap upon his shoulder, when he, on turning his head to discover the aggressor, beheld his friend Stretcher behind him, rigged in a fresh fancy-suit, selected from the most fashionable part of Holywell-street, and porting a thin, black bamboo, adorned with rather copy-perry-looking mountings and a rusty-colored tassel. His hat bore, in point of appearance, pretty much the same relationship to hats in general, as might a very old cab-horse, newly brightened in his own moisture, to the more fortunate and longer-napped of the same species; while his Monmouth-street boots appeared to be manufactured of one half leather and the other prime japan. His white hatchet-face was nearly buried in an immense mass of black hair and luxuriant whisker, broken down by an "imperial;" for, like many young artists of his calibre, Stretcher held a prodigious growth of hair absolutely indispensable to a follower of the divine Raffael and the picturesque Vandyke; while the air of genteel dissipation which he exhibited, operated like a becoming coat of varnish to this attractive picture.

Launcy soon related to him the position of

affairs as they at present stood ; and concluded by requesting him just to step into the house, introduce himself as he so well knew how, and then intercede with his respected parent for peace and pardon, as nothing could be done until they were obtained, and all parties were once more placed on their previous footing. This Mr. Stretcher undertook immediately to do, and in the course of half-an-hour most happily and successfully achieved.

The Misses Chuckchin were delighted to see the agreeable Mr. Stretcher again ; while he, on his part, complimented them on the very visible improvement which, even in this brief space, had been wrought in their appearance, by the fine, bracing, fresh air of the country, and the relief which change of scenery never fails to afford to the mind.

Mr. Daikin had that day invited a few of his own friends to dinner, amongst whom was the Widow Stiff, a retired lady of some property but more grandeur and ambition, the relict of a long-departed cattle-breeder, of the parish, who, in his life-time, had provided her with every worldly comfort and solace, and had died without issue.

Having heard Launcelot's fabrications respecting his father, reported from so many quarters, and such highly respectable sources of information, that to doubt their perfect accuracy might have been to bring her own sanity into question, Mrs. Stiff having looked into her glass, discovered that, like a somewhat faded picture, a very little touching-up would restore the resemblance of her former self, she at once resolved upon trying the vulnerability of Mr. Widge, and taking the mysterious nobleman's citadel by sap or mine.

It is not surprising, therefore, that on the occasion in question the widow appeared in great grandeur at Mr. Daikin's social party. She drove herself down in her own gig, accompanied by a little bumpkin, dressed in a blue coat with gilt buttons, and wearing a yellow riband round his hat, by way of livery ; she outshone all the other ladies present in the richness of her dress and the value of her decorations ; made herself as lively and attractive as possible in conversation ; and, while conscious of her own dignity in her communications with others, yet displayed great affability, and willingness to be pleased, towards Mr. Gabriel Widge. That gentleman, on the other hand, in the absence of his legal partner, and thinking nothing at all of the matter, unconsciously operated upon by the widow's attractive manners, grew unusually lively and facetious, and so continued throughout the entire day ; while the Misses Catkin, Collop, and Jeanstays—three maidens of very mature judgment indeed—did not for a moment hesitate to say among themselves, that they felt really astonished to see Mrs. Stiff unbend herself in

such an extraordinary and unbecoming manner ; though Mr. Daikin and her amiable spouse could see nothing more in the matter than that the widow enjoyed herself remarkably well, and that the executor of their late friend Mr. Chuckchin appeared to be quite as big a boy now, as he ever could have been in any previous part of his life.

Stretcher, who did not often find himself dropped into such capital society, made the most he could of it, as well as of the wines and brandy. He talked loudly, and sang louder ; contrived to pick up a commission or two for chalk portraits, at half-a-guinea a-piece ; and also (more pleasing still) flattered himself that, according to his own elegant reflections, he had made fast the first screw between Miss Josephine Chuckchin's affections and his own. In the midst of all this, poor Amelia alone was rather dull ; for, in spite of all she could do to prevent it, Launcy would not amuse himself with anything else but smoking cigars and secretly discharging small volleys of bread and paper pellets at the hoydenish Polly Daikin.

CHAPTER XX.

LAUNCELOT ATTENDS A PARISH STATUTE ; HIRES A SCORE OF BUMPKINS FOR HIS FATHER—A TERRIFIC CONFLICT AND FEARFUL PURSUIT OF MESSRS. LAUNCELOT AND STRETCHER.

THE catastrophe attending Launcy's first practical country-joke upon his father, had the effect, for a brief period of preventing any other attempts upon an equally great scale ; and therefore he confined himself awhile to others of an inferior sort, but still productive of amusement to himself, if to no other person. On occasion of a luncheon, or a pic-nic, in the fields, he contrived to dub the ends of the forks used on the occasion, so that each grain presented a kind of diminutive hook, that considerably embarrassed the operation of getting the meat off when once fairly on ; and on one occasion, persuaded him to a difficult walk of some weary miles, in order to show him the great natural curiosity of a bird's-nest, with nothing in it, situated in the centre of a bramble, and of such difficult access, that it cost the old gentleman a little blood, to say nothing of the danger to his eyes in his attempt to obtain a glimpse of it. When they went fishing, Launce persuaded him to bait with an earth-worm nearly as large as a halfpenny candle, on the assurance that, when he had a bite, he would catch all the larger fish with it : and at night, after they were gone to bed, would hide his clothes so

effectually, that half an hour's search was needful to recover them; and then on the following morning, endeavor to persuade him that he must have been rather in liquor the evening before, and have put them away himself, for security against surprisal when he was asleep, and could not keep guard over them. From thence he would take occasion to expatiate upon the prudence of sleeping in one's clothes in country places, where people had no locks to their chamber-doors, as being a measure highly calculated to set the mind at ease, and keep off all apprehensive and dreadful dreams. In short, we might fill a chapter with the description of such and similar vagaries, did we not feel bound to hasten, with all convenient speed, to the relation of a more stirring adventure, in which his love of practical joking eventually involved both himself and others.

Having ascertained that in the course of a few days a "statute" for the hiring of farm and domestic servants was to be held at a public house on the highway about a mile from Fosselthorpe, Launce determined to go thither, for the purpose, as he informed his father, of studying human nature in its most original form, and making valuable sketches of genuine rustic character. Accordingly, he consulted and arranged with his friend Stretcher upon the subject, and having devised and matured his plans, they set off together at about noon on the appointed day for the scene of operations.

On their arrival they found the road opposite the "Royal Oak" crowded with country fellows, almost to a man wearing bright blue smock frocks, and with large round faces as red as radishes, and nearly as expressive as the imaginary countenances of a cart-load of turnips. Most of them wore a straw tucked into their hat-band as a sign that they were to let, while those who had already been fortunate enough to get engaged, had struck that emblematic signal, and betaken themselves to drinking, smoking, singing, wrestling, or fighting, as chance or the humor might lead them. Others again, more fond of good ale, had already taken more than they could account for, and lay stretched upon the grassy waysides in untimely sleep, losing all the sport of their more lively brethren, and enduring in happy unconsciousness the various jests and tricks to which their situation left them so admirably exposed. While in a snug corner at the gable end of the inn sat three unfortunate toppers doing unpleasant duty in the parish stocks. Besides these were also collected a fine show of rural damsels of various ages, though chiefly comprising those very funny years of our existence characterized by awkward bashfulness, and much giggle without ostensible cause or sufficient given reason.

Along the road-sides were placed various

gingerbread carts and toffy stalls surrounded by watery-mouthed sucklings of both sexes, smearing their cheeks with lollypop, blowing penny trumpets, and beating imitation drums made of large pill boxes covered at either end with scraps of lawyers' parchment, while the air resounded with the abominable voices of itinerant ballad singers, and the neighboring farm-yard walls were decorated with long strings of songs sentimental and comic, apparently printed at some hedge bottom press, and on paper manufactured about a hundred and fifty years ago.

The "Royal Oak" was thronged in every room from roof to foundation, all the windows being thrown open to allow the escape of vast volumes of smoke, the manufacture of which was most industriously kept up by the innumerable pipes of the inmates.

"Prime scene, 'pon my honor!" exclaimed Stretcher. "What would David Teniers have said to this? Widge!—why not turn the current of your genius into this channel? Rustic subjects all the rage now—fame and profit together, my boy; top sawyer and good salary!"

After this the happy couple walked into the "Royal Oak" just in time to take dinner with an immense assemblage of parish constables, whom it was the custom to collect together on these occasions in order to preserve the peace and quietness of the empire. The personal appearance of the two friends at first caused them to be strongly suspected by these limbs of the law to be a couple of flash gamblers, cheats, or pickpockets; but confiding in their own combined strength and a formidable array of authoritative staves that rested upon the top of an adjoining cupboard, and considering too, that the honor of a capture might be yet in store for them, no objections were made to our heroes taking their seats at the table.

Considering the thing in the light of a good lark, both Lance and Stretcher entered boldly into the spirit of the meeting, and as they talked, sang, and drank brandy, with the best of them without evincing any after dinner disposition either to play at cards or dive into the pockets of adjoining constables, they finally departed with pretty tolerable reputations.

Being now well armed, and in excellent order for almost any thing, our two artists sallied again into the road each with a cigar in his mouth and Launce immediately commenced the task of engaging, in the name of Mr. Gabriel Widge, one after another of the unoccupied bumpkins present, until he had mustered a small army of fifteen or twenty, whom he appointed severally to wait on their new master exactly at dinner hour on the following day, at the house of Mr. Daikin of Fosselthorpe. This business settled, they spent the remaining portion of the evening in instigating fights and offering small

rewards for wrestling matches, an occupation which, together with their walk homewards, detained them until nearly ten o'clock.

Mr. Gabriel Widge had not been long seated at the dinner-table, on the following day, before he was summoned to meet a large party of farming-men, who had collected in a body at the gate, and requested to see him. An undefined sense of danger and meditated mischief crossed his mind as he laid down his knife and fork, wiped his mouth, turned pale, and expressed his wonder what so many men could possibly want him for? He began to question his own innocent but affrighted conscience, whether he could have committed any outrage upon the feelings and sensibilities of the people, of which his entire ignorance of country manners and modes of thinking made him at present unconscious. But inasmuch as he could not recollect having mowed any man's grass, stolen his horse, milked his cow, broken his fences or trespassed upon his premises, nor committed any other of the many illegal acts which innocent cockneys are liable to fall into when they get into the wilds and fastnesses of the country, this self-examination did not assist him in the least to clear up the mystery. He then thought it must be all a mistake of theirs, and that they wanted his host, Mr. Daikin, instead; being as he very reasonably suggested, a pack of poor fellows who, in all probability, had come to seek employment. Mr. Daikin, therefore, went out first, but quickly returned with the positive assurance that it was Mr. Widge, and Mr. Widge alone, they wanted to see. In that moment all Gabriel's wonted fire seemed to leave him; he cast a desiring look upon Mr. Daikin's double-barreled gun, and then walked out with much more of the air of a culprit about to receive punishment than of a large newly-established farmer, at the head of nearly twenty devoted laborers.

It may be necessary to state that Launcelot and Stretcher had taken the precaution to absent themselves on this occasion, under pretence of a long morning's walk into the country.

With unusual circumspection Mr. Widge approached the mass of physical force before him; keeping close to his host the farmer, and considerably out of arm's length of his visitors, as he requested, in a very polite manner, to know their business with him: "Business," he continued, "that I ain't able at all to conjecture at."

The clowns looked astonished at one another and at Mr. Widge, and then demanded to know whether he was not the man that had hired them at the "stattes" yesterday?

Widge denied the statement most emphatically, declared he did not want a single one of them, and should not even know where to put him if he took him; and concluded by insisting upon it over and over again, that they were al-

together mistaken, and had better go away quietly about their business.

With which sage advice he turned sharp round and hopped off into the house again, leaving his esteemed host to conclude the contention as best he could.

Mr. Daikin was not long in discovering the real source of the difficulty, and although he could scarcely avoid a smile at the joke, he still felt that it was one of a somewhat serious nature. He, therefore, exerted all his address in endeavoring to pacify the men, and would probably have succeeded had there not been amongst the crowd some few turbulent and half-tipsy spirits, who answered his expostulations at first with abuse, and eventually with threats. Words now ran high, and some talk was heard about sending for constables, when a short hedge-stake was hurled violently by an unseen hand at the farmer's head, which it happily missed. This, however, was the commencement of a general attack between the disappointed party and Mr. Daikin's own men, who now assembled from all parts of the farm and set to, pitchfork and flail in hand, with desperate ferocity. The farm-yard was invaded, stones flew in all directions, bats were beaten as flat as trenchers, pates sounded like hollow pumpkins, noses bled gloriously in the sacred cause of the right to labor, dogs barked and fought as well as men, the ladies screamed; Mr. Widge discharged the double-barreled gun into the air, and knocked himself down backwards; the geese quacked, the turkeys gobbled, the cocks and hens flew about and screamed loud enough to be heard a mile off, and, in short, a "regular row" in every department of animal life was raised, when, Launcelot and Stretcher suddenly popped their heads over the outer fence, but, finding how matters stood, as quickly drew them back again, and endeavored to make off across the country. Their movement, however, was not quick enough to enable them to get off unperceived, so that no sooner was the hue and cry raised by such of the duped party as had recognised them, than the place was instantly cleared as by a tornado, and the whole body set off over the fields and up the lanes, in desperate pursuit of the really criminal fugitives.

Already weary with their morning's excursion, the runaway artists made but indifferent progress, nor could their fears enable them to avoid being well-nigh overtaken at the distance of about half-a-mile from the house. Stretcher made a desperate push in this emergency, and succeeded in reaching a tall ash-tree, which he forthwith ascended—*how*, he could never afterwards conceive, but ascend it he did with marvellous alacrity, and before any of the party could arrive at the root, he had very nearly attained to the upper end. Looking down, he

saw the still flying Launcy caught by the coat-tail, and so nearly secured, that had he not, like a rat when similarly seized, left that appendage in the hands of the enemy, and held on his way rejoicing, he must have fallen instantaneously a victim to the ploughmen's rage. The respite, however, was but of a minute's duration, and directly afterwards he beheld him knocked down, most soundly pummeled and kicked, and then carried by the arms and legs and slung into a small pool of ketchup colored liquor which lay against a barn in the fields, and had apparently its source in some strange mountain or other piled up in the interior.

Having thus satisfied their spirit of revenge upon the principal offender, the party returned to the tree and amused themselves for half-an-hour, which to Mr. Stretcher seemed stretched into an age, in pelting him with stones and clods. Many hearty thumps did he receive, each successful hit being accompanied with a boisterous laugh that made the surrounding woods and copses ring again. At length both he and Launcy had the satisfaction to see them suddenly shoot off in all directions, as a small body of the civil force just then appeared above a neighboring hill.

Much to Mr. Stretcher's own amazement, for he was no natural philosopher, he discovered that he had far more trouble to get down from his airy height than he had remarked on ascending to-it, so that the constabulary actually arrived on the ground almost as soon as he did himself. Launcy still lay on the grass beside the picturesque pond before-mentioned, groaning and blubbering like a whipped school-boy; but, on being picked up, exhibited marks of punishment, which put an instant extinguisher upon all surprise at his unearthly belowlings. The first proposition made was to wash and cleanse him, and as a gentle brook hard by favored the Christian design, he was carefully conveyed there, and afterwards back to Fosselthorpe, on an old barn-door, suspended upon the shoulders of four men, Stretcher marching before and industriously propagating a tremendous report of the resistance they had made, and especially his gallant friend now on the door, until overpowered by mere brute force and superior numbers. In the midst of the interesting recital of Mr. Stretcher, one of the men's shoulders gave way beneath the pressure upon it, and Launcelot incontinently rolled off the door into the dusty road, licking up a coat of earth in the fall, and exhibiting when again restored to his place, no very remote resemblance to a large wet garden slug when rolled in the sand.

Ere the arrival of this melancholy procession at the farm, peace had already been re-established within its limits, and quietness restored to every bosom except that of Mr. Gabriel Widge—for, no sooner did he ascertain from his host

that Launcy was at the bottom of the whole mischief, than his rage defied all control, and he made a violent vow never to eat bit nor drink drop until he saw him well punished for his pains. In fact, he was just upon the point of repealing the oath with various collateral asseverations, when the house-door was darkened by the introduction of the barn-door, and the unfortunate Launcelot, or rather what remained of him, was displayed to his eyes. Gabriel's vindictiveness vanished at the sight like hoar-frost from a window-pane before the morning sun. Miss Amelia shrieked and fainted, while her sister flew to the kitchen-boiler for a supply of hot water, and all the rest of the females busied themselves in preparing the bed to which he was shortly afterwards carried.

A few glasses of warm grog, mixed and administered by the dimpled hand of the fair Amelia, soon revived him, and before shutting up for the night, he was even enabled to work a cigar in company with Stretcher and Mr. Gabriel, who watched till bed-time by his side.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. WIDGE ENCOUNTERS HER HUSBAND AND THE WIDOW STIFF FACE TO FACE IN FOSSELTHORPE CHURCH-YARD—WHAT HAPPENED THEREIN,

WIDOW STIFF and the mysterious nobleman were by this time fairly established upon easy visiting terms, while the restless and tender solicitude which the former could not help but feel during the sickness of her anticipated son-in-law, afforded a very just plea for frequent visits, as well as a fair opportunity for doing the amiable before his singular parent. For although she often heard Mr. Widge spoken of as a tradesman and a married man, it had no effect whatever upon her, seeing that all who thus talked were only laboring under the popular delusion, while she was in happy possession of the real secret both of the eccentric nobleman's conduct, and of his motives for it.

Thus things went on very smoothly during a week that Launcelot deemed it expedient to keep his room; although, as it subsequently appeared, he did not exactly suffer time to slip through his fingers while he himself lay idle.

Shifting our scene from Fosselthorpe to St. Martin's-lane, we find the postman one morning knocking at Mr. Widge's door, and delivering a letter addressed to Mrs. Widge, and conspicuously marked "confidential" on the outside. That lady had for some days been on the look-out for a billet from her spouse, and was even then wondering how he could be so neglectful, considering the number of years

they had lived together without so long a separation, so that it was not surprising she should instantly abandon her household affairs and hurry up-stairs to peruse his country epistle in the quiet of the dining-room. But how shall we paint the moral shock she suffered,—the anguish of mind she underwent, or the frantic rage she exhibited, on reading the following terrible intelligence :

“ To Mrs. G. Widge.

“ MADAM,

“ If there be such a woman as yourself in the world, of which there appears some doubt, to you are these few lines addressed : but if not,—if you never did nor do exist, they can never reach you, and hence you will happily be spared all the pain they are calculated to give. I am sorry to be the vehicle of bad news, and also that female delicacy and the great responsibility of the task I have undertaken, forbid me to place my name to this letter ; but you may rely upon me nevertheless, for when I tell you that I know your husband, Mr. Gabriel Widge, and that he is now staying with two young ladies and his son at Mr. Daikin's, at Fosselthorpe, in Leicestershire, your own private knowledge of the same facts must demonstrate to you that I am worthy of credibility. But, madam, it would be the height of cruelty in me to keep you in an agony of suspense that must be really awful to endure, by delaying to launch at once into the subject of communication between us ; and, therefore, for your greater satisfaction, I hasten to inform you that your correspondent is one of your own gender, grammatically speaking—a maiden of maturity, and at present a resident in these parts ; and happy is she to be able to congratulate herself that base and barbarous man, with all his winning pretences and wiles, has never been able to win her over to his sinister views ; although she does not vainly arrogate the merit of this to her own unaided strength of mind, but attributes it all to the favor of the Lord, who, through grace, has never suffered her to be much tempted by those base male deceivers. Happy I am, let me repeat, to say this when I see the shocking spectacle of an old gray-headed man—yes, an old married patriarch—for an old man your husband is, as you well know, so far declining from the path of righteousness as to take advantage of his temporary separation from his lawful wife, on pretence of a country visit to indulge his odious and disgraceful propensities by casting his dim and watery sheep's-eyes on other women—OTHER WOMEN, I say, and actually pretending he is a widower, in order the easier to attain his vile, his despicable, and his loose ends ! There, madam, what do you think of that ? Does not your very blood boil with virtuous indignation at his unheard-of duplicity and

baseness ? Could you not spurn the old wretch from you like a lump of living offal, and leave him to die neglected and despised by even the very creatures whose favor he is seeking at the expense of your sacred honor as a mother and a wife. Oh, the deceitful sinner ! Had I the misfortune to have such a thing—for I could not call him husband—I could tear his eyes out, I could scald the very hair off of his head, and make it into a brush to scrub a sinkstone with. But, thank Heaven, I never yet fell before the hand of that inconceivable monster called man, and confidently trust, after having arrived at my sixty-fifth year in safety, that I never shall.

“ One word more and I have done—for you will never hear from me again.

“ I am ashamed, I blush even to the nose-end, to think that any of *my sex* can still be found not only to suffer the abominable advances of such disgraces to society, but even go so far as positively to seek for them. But of such—may I say diabolical materials, are some old men and some *widows* made. I know you will be grateful for this information to, madam,

“ A SECRET FRIEND.”

No reader of the least imagination will feel surprised to learn that the unhappy and abandoned mother of the Widge family quite lost the sense of all the concluding portions of this blighting epistle, although her fixed and glaring eyes passed along its freezing words like burnished steel on ice. The paper fell dead from her hand, and she herself from her chair. When she came to herself she was still alone. Her eyes wandered about the room as though in search of some familiar objects to recognise and derive assurance from that she was still at home—at home : an unhappy inmate still of the Widge residence, and not the tenant of some suburban mad-house. She was resolved what to do ; she would take a post-chaise instantly, and when down at Fosselthorpe expose the double-faced deceitful villain upon the very spot of his infamy before his acquaintance and the world.

The fact was, her brains and her resolutions were so completely bewildered, so desperately storm-blown and confounded, that she knew not what to do ; and hence resumed her chair and cried plentifully during the space of a couple of hours. After that she took the horrid Bath-post sheet up again and re-read it. Her wrath kindled anew as she read ; and, starting up from the table, she seized a bodkin and furiously plunged it through the canvas heart of Launcy's most celebrated portrait of the deeply misunderstood Mr. Widge. The commission of this metaphorical murder somewhat relieved her at the moment, and especially as it left no deeper “ damning spot ” upon her hand than a little tenacious mastic varnish was fully equal

to; but very soon she turned as bad again as ever, and then she turned the smiling deceiver with his face and portly stomach altogether to the wall.

That night, the lonely Mrs. Widge heard St. Martin's clock strike every hour, and the locomotive watchman growl out to the neighborhood his surly information that it had so struck. But before daylight came she fell asleep; dreamed of dire fallings-off on the part of old men, and scandalous advances made by forgetful widows, whose former loves had now grown as cold as the corpses with which they were buried. She awoke, unrefreshed; but at least determined, fully determined, on her future course.

Accordingly, she departed that morning alone by the coach, without ever mentioning to her family either her object or her visit, and in due time was set down at the same little inn where the previous party had enjoyed so pleasant a dinner. From this place she despatched a messenger to Mr. Daikin's, bearing a private note to her son Launcelot, which that agreeable youth opened, and read with evident delight. The subject thereof he kept entirely to himself; but, being now convalescent, he arose and dressed himself for a walk, and after idling a short time about the farm-yard, just to divert attention, was suddenly missed altogether.

Dinner-hour arrived, but Launcy had not made his appearance; a startling fact which somewhat alarmed Mr. Widge, senior, who dreaded the effects of his recent feverish condition, and began to feel certain apprehensions that he might have gone off in a fit of temporary insanity, and either lost himself in the wilds or committed suicide. So far, however, from any thing so dreadful being the case, Mr. Launcelot was all the while sipping port, puffing cigars, and consulting with his mother at the little inn in the little town before described.

Night had fairly set in when Launcelot, with many appearances of precaution, conducted his mother by a back way to Mrs. Stiff's house: and then, by the connivance of the servant, up a dark staircase into almost as dark a room, where she was allowed just time enough to breathe before being thrust into a close musty closet hung with unoccupied gowns, and old coats, the property of the late Mr. Stiff, but now abandoned for ever. As Launcelot closed the latch outside, he also turned the key and withdrew it, leaving the jealous woman inside perfectly secure until such time as it might please his gracious self to set her at liberty again. With her eye to the keyhole, Mrs. Widge awaited with tolerable patience a long time. She sat down as well as she could upon a low shelf, and ruminated and moralized upon her situation—endeavoring to throw as much interest as possible into her speculations, in order the easier to pass away this tedious wait-

ing-time. Still nobody came. All this while Mr. Gabriel Widge, and Launcelot and Mr. and Mrs. Daikin, and the Misses Chuckchin and Stretcher, were comfortably taking their evening meal, and chatting and laughing in a parlor down below. To Mrs. Widge, who had no other employment but that of watching the rays of moonlight as they progressed along the wafle of the exterior room, and wondering what in the world was the matter, this comparatively brief space of time seemed interminable. At length Launce and deliverance came.

"Very sorry, mother," said he, "but couldn't help it. They've done tea now, and it is such a fine moonlight night, are getting ready for a walk just round the church-yard. Pop out directly, run down stairs, and hide yourself behind a grave stone till they come, and then you'll see a sight worth looking at."

Saying which, he unlocked the door, and very soon had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Widge hurrying off in the direction pointed out to await the approach of the tea-party. Now, seeing that Mr. Daikin had Mrs. Daikin to take care of,—Mr. Stretcher, Miss Josephine, and Launcelot himself, Miss "Mealy,"—no alternative remained for the innocent Mt. Widge but, as in all courtesy bound, to offer his arm to the widow Stiff. It so fell out also, that this last named couple walked first; the widow, as they approached the place of graves, reviving many melancholy reminiscences of the lamented Stiff, who now lay both cold and stiff in the bosom of that same holy earth.

"Yonder," said the widow, as they entered the mournful precincts, "beneath that tall white headstone, lies all Mr. Widge,—all that I once placed my whole earthly affections upon! I leaned only on that one frail reed, and it broke before me! Do let us walk up and look close upon the spot, for my bed is made there too, sir, though the sleeper is not yet ready for her pillow."

Mr. Widge never knew how to deal with any thing pathetic—it put him quite out of his way, and therefore he returned no answer, but gladly struck off the path into the long dewy grass, dragging the widow along with him over mound and hollow, and sunken headstones, until he reached the particular spot they had in view. By way of showing the great interest he took in the matter, Gabriel immediately leaned down towards the stone, and by the aid of the moonlight began, in an audible voice to peruse the inscription thereon.

"Beneath this stone lie the remains of——"

"A vile old sinner!" shrieked an unearthly voice, as Mrs. Widge darted from behind, and at one blow so effectually disarranged Gabriel's equilibrium as to lay him instantly flat (or at least as flat as his natural rotundity would permit) with the earth.

The widow, as soon as she could so far col-

fect her scattered faculties as to think of her heels, fled screaming from the spot, under the direful conviction that she had fallen in with some unfortunate deceived and newly made village maniac.

Gabriel scrambled up in utter horror, and would also have made off under the horrible impression that he was possessed of a devil just risen from the tombs, had not Mrs. Widge seized him by the coat-collar.

"Stay," she exclaimed, "and don't think to escape me. I know your tricks—I've heard of your doings, and now I've caught you. Have I? What, you thought of taking *his* place, did you?" her finger pointed earthwards, "you were a widower, were you? I was dead, was I? But we'll soon see whether I'm dead or not!—I'm dead, am I? I'll teach you to go courting again at your time of life!" and as she uttered these wild exclamations she accompanied them with so many fierce pokes, that Gabriel was driven to stand upon his own defence, and ward off her intended blows; at the same time he cried out to her to desist, declared she was mad, and swore that he was as innocent as a lamb. But his better half, decidedly the better in this contest, paid no attention to him and but for the timely interference of Mr. Daikin and Launcelot, would have still gone on for an indefinite period at the same employment. By their help, however, the victor was detached from the vanquished, and conducted by Launcy and Stretcher back to her inn, while Gabriel and his party returned to Mrs. Stiff's residence, wonderfully puzzled what to make of the late most mysterious proceedings, and at a total loss, with all their combined tongues and wisdom, to hammer out any rational explanation of the cause of them.

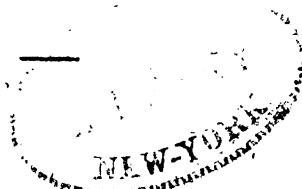
One matter only was cleared to the deep disappointment of Widow Stiff, that Mr. Widge was a tradesman instead of a disguised knight, and a married man instead of a widower. Disappointed, however, as she could not but feel in her own heart she turned the joke off with a laugh; but at heart gave up for ever the idea of again attempting to lay the foundation of the house of Stiff, and especially with Mr. Widge's cement.

Early on the following morning, a couple of delegates, in the interesting persons of the Misses Chuckchin, waited upon Mrs. Widge with a flag of truce, for the purpose—as not unfrequently happens after an engagement—of inquiring into the cause of dispute, and endeavoring to make terms of peace. After many long explanations on one side, and protestations of total misunderstanding on the other, it was agreed that Mr. Gabriel Widge himself, in person, should be admitted of the council. Upon his arrival the two young diplomatists held a preparatory sitting with him in another room, after which they conducted him before his wife.

They met in silence and with downcast eyes. In fact, Gabriel scarcely ever had been known to look so serious before. He felt that he was an injured man—the victim of village scandal, and of a wofully misled and passionate wife. While that wife herself had, by this time, become so far conscious that her maiden friend had only duped her, that for very shame and vexation she could not at first look her much injured spouse in the face. At length Gabriel said something about a pretty exposure—cutting a figure—and making one's self look ridiculous in the eyes of everybody one knew: which drew from Mrs. Widge an allusion to infamous letters—hateful and anonymous old maids—other people's suspicions as well as her own—and an avowal that in all probability if he had been placed in her situation, he very likely would have done the same.

Mr. Widge did not feel in a humor to stickle about trifles, and, therefore, readily admitted the fact; so that a perfect reconciliation was effected between the two within half an hour after. Gabriel would fain have had his wife accompany them back to Mr. Daikin's, but she stoutly refused to show her face in that quarter again, and only requested that he would return to London with her as early as possible. Considering the events that had happened, it must be confessed that Gabriel did not himself feel quite comfortable at the idea of remaining much longer to be stared at, and, perhaps, laughed at besides, by the "polite peasantry" of this country; and, consequently, was easily induced to give in to her desires. And, inasmuch also as the Misses Chuckchin expressed their weariness of a monotonous country life, and their perfect willingness to return immediately to town—a hurried departure was prepared for, and the following morning saw the whole party again on their way homewards.

We cannot close the chapter without informing the reader, that notwithstanding this happy conclusion of a very awkward affair, Mrs. Widge subsequently fell back a little upon her previous notions, and occasionally, when slight differences arose—as arise they sometimes did—between herself and her husband, failed not to remind him distantly of the Stiff business to the end of his natural life. She never, however, very happily for him, discovered that Launcelot himself penned that terrible letter with his own ingenious hand.



CHAPTER XXII.

MR. STRETCHER GIVES A BRIEF INSIGHT INTO HIS PROFESSION, AND ASSISTS LAUNCELOT IN FINDING A BACHELOR'S HALL: WITH A SUPPER AT MRS. NEVERDONE'S.

Not long after their return to London and hard work, our hero Launcy opened his batteries upon his father, touching the subject of separate establishment for himself.

"Forsake the paternal roof, Launcy!" exclaimed Gabriel,— "won't do at all, my boy,—can't spare you at that rate yet. What would your mother say, do you think?"

"Be glad to get rid of me," replied the youth, "for she's always complaining that I either paint the furniture, smear the chairs, or oil the carpets."

"Oh, if that's all," answered Mr. Widge, "we'll soon stop that. She must know that furniture is mine, and them chairs is mine, and you ain't going to have your genius nipped i' th' bud by her nonsense."

But Launce protested there were many other considerations to be taken into the account, and chiefly with respect to worldly appearances and the proper accommodation of sitters—a painting-room, at least, he must have in some other situation than the lane, and especially as he was now meditating upon and about to commence his first great production, the *Siege of Troy*. Casts would be required, dresses, armor, living models, and, in short, nearly as much actual material as is comprised in an ordinary broker's shop.

These and similar arguments had due weight with the elder Widge, because, in fact he knew not how to combat them; and at length he finally agreed that Launcelot should take a painting-room, but still continue to live at home.

About half-past ten that morning young Widge, accompanied by his friend Stretcher, set out on an exploring expedition.

Everybody will at once admit that in the matter of apartments an "undeniable situation" is the first great requisite. But the situation first offered them was, in the opinion of the lady who had it to let, perfectly irresistible. "A livelier and pleasanter you couldn't find, and pick London over. We have a gin-shop on each side sir, as has five bands a-day apiece, and a'most all of 'em horneys and pistons, trombones and drums, besides pan-pipes, and a hurdy-gurdy all a-going at vunce; and sometimes we're favored, in at th' bargain, with a horgan and a monkey as plays 'Home, sweet home,' and 'Oh no, we never,' beautiful, sir. Yer needn't niver guv un noat, 'cos the palaces pays for that, so it's a riglar saving in going to hear concerts and orchesterers. And then, sir, for conveniency, there's a matter of fifty or

sixty homnibuses as goes up and down five or six times each every day,—more on a Sunday,—and runs till 'leven o'clock at night. But, above all, we're close within smel of the railroad,—pop down to the station in three minnits' walk."

"Pon my honor," exclaimed Stretcher, "I wonder your place is not snapped up before you have time to hoist a bill in the window."

It is astonishing, eartlinly, sir. I can't account for it at all, sir."

"I should think you have many battles, too, amongst the applicants for the rooms as to which should have them?"

"Oh no, sir, nothing of that here! One of the peaceablest houses a-going, I assure you."

"Glad of it," responded Stretcher; "always keep out of the way of the constable if you can. Well, as we shan't be likely to disturb your quiet,—for my friend here is a ranting, ranting dog, we won't waste any more of your invaluable time, so good morning, ma'am. Come, Widge, let us get out of the way, for I hear that bandy-legged fellow blowing his pan-pipes already!"

And so saying, Stretcher dropped down stairs like a shot, and fairly ran the length of the street, until overtaken by Launcelot.

The next place appeared more promising, and possibly might have been taken, but when Launcy began to act and talk professionally, by closing a portion of the shutters and asking his friend whether he thought it a good light to "throw on the subject," he raised certain unpleasant visions in the imagination of the landlady which instantly prompted her to suggest, that if he was a gentleman of that description she would much rather decline taking him in. In fact, after an hour or two's ineffectual search, Launcelot began to suspect that individuals of his profession were at a considerable discount amongst the lodging-house keepers, not a few of whom appeared to consider the question of their paying their way with regularity as very apocryphal; but at length he alighted on a place in a street leading from the south side of Oxford-street, which perfectly suited his taste. It was one of those fine old houses which now lie under the misfortune of being both out of fashion and out of place,—with a large marbled hall, carved decorations, and a stone staircase of sufficient amplitude to admit of the easy ascent of three Daniel Lamberts abreast. The first floor, consisting of one extensive apartment quite equal to the vastness of Launcy's present views, and a goodly-sized room behind, he at once engaged, inserting a provisional clause in his specification, that the first flight of stairs should be at his disposal and control, and also that (being the head occupant) his brass plate should stand in the very centre of the street door.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SUPPER PARTY.

HAVING secured a room, Launcelot's next step was to furnish it in true artistical taste. This being a work requiring judgment and selection, was also one of time; and Launce and his friend expended more than a week in making the needful purchases before it could be considered tolerably complete. During the whole of this time Stretcher quartered himself pretty generally upon his friend, and of course took care to fare considerably better than when upon his usual commons. Nightly did they attend the auctions at "the Slaughter House," and make extensive purchases from amongst the indescribable mass of every thing appertaining to art and artists, which the indefatigable Mr. Jones there submits to public competition.

When all arrangements were effected Stretcher suggested a snug supper to a few select friends, as indispensable on the occasion—the painting-room could never be considered "warmed" without it—not so free and open as it ought to be to members of the profession; and at the same time it would afford him (Mr. Stretcher) an opportunity for which he had long wished, of introducing Widge under very favorable circumstances to an immense friend of his—one Tom Tinkle, an artist of great celebrity about Kensington, although as yet his merits had not been so thoroughly recognised in the metropolis as they deserved to be. Launce was never very strongly opposed to any proposition that comprehended within its limits the certainty of enjoyment, and therefore, without much consideration, acceded to the present one, and forthwith issued notes of invitation to a select party of "Museumites," numbering a good half-dozen; while Stretcher undertook to save a penny postage, by communicating personally with Tinkle, and bringing him along on the appointed evening. This disinterested young gentleman also put out a broad hint touching the propriety of inviting the Misses Chuckchlin, but Launcelot would not hear of it; declaring that women would spoil the whole harmony and enjoyment of the night,—that they were nothing but a bother wherever they went, and hence he was determined to have it exclusively a male party and nothing else.

But Mr. Widge, junior, little thought what he was doing when he requested his landlady, Mrs. Neverdone, to serve up a supper for ten on the following Friday night. Would that fate had directed him to fix on any other night than that! She knew it, though he did not; she foresaw the difficulties and the troubles, and thereof were her midnight dreams made, and filled thick with coming horrors; but, like a prudent woman, she did not venture to con-

tradict the expressed will of a good new lodger, and especially upon the first occasion that he had required any thing at her hands since his coming under the roof.

Friday evening came, then, and Mr. Gabriel Widge came about an hour before anybody else; and one by one in rapid succession the Museumites came, and finally, though still in time enough, came Mr. Stretcher and Mr. Thomas Tinkle; and awhile after all this came the hour for supper to be placed on the table, but the supper itself came not. And the reason why it did not come was the universal one, because it was not ready. It would have been ready had not two large kettles twice filled required to be kept boiling in company with Mr. Widge's potatoes, for the use of the small garrison of lodgers who populated all the remaining portion of the house. At the same time large haystacks of toast had to be made, to the temporary exclusion of the fire from Mr. Widge's fore-quarter of lamb, and then to be kept warm in the oven while his baked meats were taken out and put to cool on the dresser. Mrs. Neverdone had exerted her utmost in endeavoring to make arrangements that all these various wants should not occur at precisely one and the same moment; but inasmuch as Signor Mangolini, who taught dancing and fencing on the second floor, could not have his pupils disappointed of their glass of grog, and Mrs. Patchett, on the third, *must* have tea for herself and five small girls precisely at eight, while Miss Patmore, the maid, would not think for a moment of being put out of *her* way for any body's suppers; of course, poor Mrs. Neverdone quite failed in the attempt, and our jovial party on the first-floor were driven to exhaust nearly all their supper conversation before supper came, and with stoical calmness await the dispensations of fortune and of Mrs. Neverdone for the rest.

The case appears still harder when we come to consider that several of the Museumites had purposely absented themselves from the dining-rooms that day in order to be the better prepared to do justice to Mr. Widge's hospitality, while Stretcher and Tinkle, with the same laudable object in view, had only just avoided absolute rebellion in their stomachs by giving a single "sop," in the shape of a chop and a pint of "arf-and arf" each to his internal Cerberus.

Nor were the exertions of Mrs. Neverdone and her servant much facilitated by Launcelot's almost momentary ringing of the bell, in order to have answered again and again the same question in the same manner, only with the addition, perhaps, of "in a few minutes, sir, it 'll be ready, sir;" followed by a corresponding interval of at least half an hour.

At length the first item made its appearance, and was followed at slow intervals by others,

so that one dish entirely vanished before another was ready, and thus even at last was this running fire of eating, this flying supper finally got through.

It was a positive relief, a delight to all hands when the table was at last cleared, the candles were trimmed, the wine and grog set out, the cigars sending forth their fragrant odor, and the whole party, with outstretched legs, gathered like a semicircular fencing round the fire, talking, laughing, singing, or telling tales; while dim statues, and large easels, and great canvases, and old portfolios, and wild sketches in oil, and innumerable bits of antiquity, mingled with draperies, and books, and bits of old armor, peeped in glorious confusion from the obscurity of the surrounding apartment.

The night proved so remarkably stormy and wet, the wind blew so wonderfully hard, and the coaches vanished away from the stands with such fearful rapidity, that by the time our party thought of separating, separation was, as the world says in such matters, quite impossible. Conveyances were not to be had, or if at all, at prices which set all present, except Mr. Widge, senior, and his son, at defiance—for the weather inspired coachmen with a wonderful spirit of independence, and taught them to stand upon their rights as coachmen, after the most approved democratic fashion. The fire was, therefore, again heaped up, additional bottles were opened, a box of cigars was placed upon the table for the good of the community, and two more hours at least of comfort lay in a dreary prospect before them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LAUNCELOT'S MARRIAGE WITH AMELIA, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

LAUNCELOT having, at his father's urgent instigation, been brought to propose to Miss Amelia Chuckchin, the day was quickly fixed for the marriage. We verily believe that the wedding was almost as solemn a ceremony as a funeral. Launcelot took Amelia for his wedded wife without hope or joy. There were no opening gates of paradise, no purple light of love streaming over the battlements of Eden—none of the bright promises that to most young brides and bridegrooms make earth and the life before them an ideal Heaven, arising in the brightness of a coming future for them. It was not marriage so much as a bond to live together. There were downcast eyes and beating hearts, but no tremblings, and flutterings, and hopeful little dreads; nor half sad young joys, nor smiling sadnesses flitting over the change-

ful breast-like leaf shadows on the surface of a summer brook. But when Gabriel kissed the bride after the ceremony, and pressed her hand with a fervent "God bless you, my child!" tears were on the cold stone beneath their feet, and sobs upon the sepulchral air, as over the final act of a regretted burial. The shadow of the past seemed to involve the present and darken the future. But when the dreary church was left behind, and the solemnity of the white-haired priest forgotten,—when the numerous company, and the unusual preparations, and the glad-looking household of Mr. Widge, began to exercise their influence upon the mind, Amelia looked more gay, and Launcelot seemed to consider that, perhaps, it might not be such a bad job after all. In any case there were the materials of present enjoyment in abundance, and if trouble were in store for them, why anticipate it before its appointed time? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." Sufficient at least for him, as it is for all who, like him, look on to-day only as theirs, and to-morrow as a day that, if it come at all to them, must find its own remedy for its own sorrow.

With all his knowledge, his experience, and his observation, day by day, man knows but little of the female heart. Even he who begins to describe its feelings and its trials in such a sketch of human character as this history may exhibit, knows not, and cannot conjecture, to what end it may lead him before he has arrived at his conclusion. Where he commenced with hope he may terminate with fear, with joy in misery, with misery at the outset, perhaps end in gladness and triumph. He finds the flower cast away like a weed, and the seeming worthless pebble prove a gem of precious value. Man knows not fully how imperceptible is the division between natural affection and social crime, or how the feminine criminal of society may at the same time be almost a hero amongst her sex. One sin does not fill the measure any more than one virtue constitutes a saint.

Shorn of nearly all the resources he had hitherto enjoyed, and not yet admitted to the least use of his wife's fortune, while patrons in the shape of sitters were few and far between, our hero had some difficulty to get on satisfactorily, and consequently soon became as inattentive and morose as a biped of his disposition was sure to become on finding himself suddenly as it were cast down from abundance and ease to poverty and hard struggles, he sulkily regarded his wife as the cause of all this, and very soon began to treat her accordingly. The gates of his pleasures were all closed; his painting-room no longer enlivened by the jollity of the Museumites and the facetiousness of Mr. Stretcher, became a place to idle his solitary hours in; while poor "Mealy," who now could neither please him nor excite his sympa-

thies, passed most of her time in silent operations with the needle in her chamber, sometimes crying to relieve her monotony, and sometimes trying, in spite of heart and sad thoughts to sing, which was more abortive and melancholy still.

At length, after weeks and weeks of unquerable ill-temper and spiteful dudgeon, he seemed to wax desperate, and while in this fit one morning returned from a walk accompanied by two strangers whom he took into the presence of his wife without a word of introduction on either side, and sitting down to the table, drew from his pocket a paper which he handed to Amelia with the sour remark, "Here, Mealy, get pen and ink, and sign that."

"I do not ask what it is," replied she, as she proceeded to obey his directions, "because—"

"Because it is my business," interrupted Launcy, "and I do not require any of your advice about it." Then turning to one of the strangers, with the paper, which had now received his wife's signature, between his fingers, he added in an altered tone which made Amelia feel bitterly that even perfect strangers had more of his respect than herself, "Now, sir, if you will please to witness this, the business can soon be settled." He then looked at his wife, and remarked, "You can go into the other room now, we do not want you any more." She did go, but her tears fell on the carpet as she quitted the apartment.

When the door was closed behind her, the second stranger, who happened to be no other than our old acquaintance Saul, handed Launcelot a draft for a thousand pounds and received in exchange the security which Amelia had signed.

Although the latter named lady never made further inquiry upon the subject of the paper, nor ever received any voluntary information from the lips of her husband, yet the numerous knockings of the tailors' boys at the door with new garments, for L. Widge, Esq.; of the vintner's porter with dozens of wine and little cartloads of stout and demijohns of spirits, together with the not unfrequent appearance of Launcy himself with a box of cigars nearly as long as a child's coffin under his arm, sufficiently convinced her that there were more methods of raising money in London than through either a father's liberality or a wife's possessions. But although the discovery of this fact turned her pale with undefined fear, and made her heart ache when she considered to what possible gulf of misery her husband's reckless course might eventually lead them, she did not mention the subject to any one, not even to that husband himself.

One change, however, made her feel comparatively happy under all her anxiety. With renewed resources, Launcy exhibited also a re-

newal of kindness and good temper; and down the brief stream of wealth which he had thus put in motion, he seemed inclined to float with all the delight of a new experimentalist, who finds for the first time triumphant success in the swimming of a boat made and invented by himself.

The Museumite parties were renewed. Stretcher was himself again—rollicking nights followed by idle days succeeded each other with great rapidity, and even the dancings and stampings of Signor Mangolini and his pupils on the deep-suffering boards of the second floor, were not unfrequently drowned in the roar of bacchanalian songs and sentimental ditties within the painting-room of Mr. Launcelot Widge. In these scenes, Mrs. Widge could not of course participate. Her occupation was to work or read in her bed-room alone, hearing boisterous laughs that made her miserable, and sometimes a plaintive song or two of former times which almost made her sigh for the past hopeful days of maidenhood—the dark old parlor in Long-Acre, and the tinkling old untuneable piano of her departed father's, which had been economically put to her own and her sister's use after the fact had become clear that it would never be redeemed.

Meantime Launcy's stock of new canvases maintained both their virgin purity of priming and their position by the wall, and his easel still exhibited the unfinished picture, half paint, half outline, of two months ago. His attendance in the "Life Academy" at Somerset House became doubtful, and of unpropitious import in the eyes of the great men of that establishment, and he lost a somewhat promising appearance of patronage through his inability, from a nervous pencil and an uncertain eye, to render the portrait of a young lady sitter with any thing like tolerable accuracy. At times, however, he was taken with very desperate fits of painting, and acting under the never subsiding effects of the copious stimulants he was constantly pouring into his stomach, would rise at very unusual hours, though more because he could not sleep than from devotion to his profession, sit at his easel till his meals were cold, because he had no appetite, though his wife believed from a very different motive, and covered canvas by the square yard with the hideous distortions of diseased brains and the nightmare, produced by devouring raw bacon before going to bed, in order to improve and brighten his imagination.

But these convulsive efforts soon ended in the invariable self-disappointment which they raised, and inasmuch as drinking, smoking, and talking were of much easier achievement, the evening parties of enjoyment flourished more prosperously than ever.

In the very midst of one of them, Mr. Gabriel Widge one night chanced to drop in about

nine o'clock. Since the period of the last recorded scene between that gentleman and his son, Gabriel had preserved a becoming distance, as Gabriel had resolved to carry out his resolutions respecting Launcelot with determination, even at the expense to a calculable extent of his own paternal feelings and high aspirations after the future destiny of his child of genius. Still he felt strong interest in ascertaining how his master-stroke, as he considered it, of domestic and family policy had succeeded, and hence his unexpected visit on the night in question for the purpose of ocular demonstration.

From the operation of causes beyond his own control, the old gentleman had somehow or other missed taking his usual dose of drink during the day, and hence was not only remarkably sober, but remarkably sour also, and strongly disposed to be uncommonly severe on any one who might chance to be more comfortably satisfied than he was himself in that important particular.

"Ah! glad to see you, respected progenitor," exclaimed Launcey, in a half-tipsy drawl; as his father walked in; "no objection to your old phiz, though you have stopped the supplies; but you see there's more springs than run in Martin's Lane—we aint come short of creature comforts yet, nor wont so long as I've seven hundred left in my pocket."

And thus expressing himself, Launcey cast a devil-may-care sort of glance upon his father, not unmingled with a more malicious and quarrelsome expression, that told there were hotter fires under this smoke than at that moment showed themselves.

"Where's Mealy?" asked Gabriel very seriously.

"I'm sure I don't know, nor care either very much," answered Launce; "them as had most to do with bringing her here, ought to know best where she's gone to."

"Gentlemen," cried Stretcher, rising from his chair, and lighting a fresh cigar to smoke on his way home, "I'm off—there's clouds in the wind, I've no top-coat on. Excuse me giving the hint, but as our friend and his father seem to have private business on hand, we may becomingly withdraw."

"No, no, you shan't go!" exclaimed Launce, with great emphasis; "just sit down again, and stop where you are. I've nothing to say that I am ashamed of anybody hearing, as far as that matter goes. I've been dealt hardly by, and I don't care who knows it."

"Come, gentlemen," repeated Stretcher; "you know, Launce, I always make it a point to clear up other people's wrecks, so you will excuse us to-night. I see your father has more to say than concerns us, so good-night to you both—good-night, Mr. Widge—and remember that all's well that ends well."

And then followed a bustle and a long list of rather equivocal "good-nights," and a light on the staircase held by Mr. Widge, the elder in person, and then the consciousness on the part of Launcelot that he was sitting in no enviable humor by his ash-smothered and blazeless fire-side alone.

Some time elapsed ere Mr. Widge re-entered the painting-room, for, on returning up-stairs after showing a light down the staircase, he tapped at the bed-chamber door, and finding the forsaken Amelia, who burst into tears on seeing him, not yet even thinking of retiring to rest, he remained to have a chat with her.

In the altered looks, the broken joyousness of the daughter of his old friend, Mr. Widge now, for the first time, saw reason to doubt the propriety and the success of the "experiment" in the way of marriage which he had tried; and the doubt suddenly fell upon him with the fearful weight of a thunderbolt; for in the same instant he seemed to feel also for the first time that it was an experiment not to be recalled in this life, and the result of which must be looked for in one or both of the young people's graves. But his sadness on this account did not prevent him from gathering all the information it was in Amelia's power to bestow respecting the doings of his son, and especially with reference to his boasted raise of money; although with fond and infatuated partiality the injured wife represented everything in Launcelot's favor, and fondly clung to his well meaning heart, as she considered it, and his honorable character, with the tenacity of a loving enthusiast.

Gabriel was too much of a man of business not to detect in a moment, even from her imperfect explanation, the real nature of the paper to which she had annexed her signature; and that detection seemed to put the finishing stroke, the impalpable keenness of age to his feelings of rage and resentment.

"Stay where you are, Mealy," he said, "just while I go and talk with the young villain—"

"Oh, do not call him so!" she cried, "do not use harsh language to him—"

"Pshaw! curse his despicable tricks; you are too soft for him by half; but I'll bring him on his knees; I'll make him repent and come and beg your pardon before I leave this house, or I'll never set foot in it again! Now do not follow me,—it is of no use talking—the thing must and shall be done!" And so saying Gabriel closed the door between his daughter-in-law and himself, and walked into the painting-room adjoining.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFFECTIONATE DISCOURSE BETWEEN LAUNCELOT
AND HIS FATHER.

WHEN Mr. Widge entered, Launcy was still sitting over the fire blowing a cigar almost as furiously as bloweth a street musician his flageolet, while the contents of the brandy decanter had evidently diminished in his absence. Mr. Widge mixed himself a glass, and while stirring it, thus resumed the conversation—

"So *that* is the way you raise money, and this is the way you spend it, is it?"

"It looks very much like it, pa," replied Launce, "don't you think so?"

"And don't you feel yourself to be a precious scoundrel into the bargain?"

"No, pa, not a bit of it; I'm not going to be driven into marrying and then starved besides, to please nobody, not I, indeed. I know one thing, I've been a precious deal too easy all along; but it won't do any more—that mill has stopped work, and for the future folks will find that I am quite as well made for scooping marrow out as they are."

"Well, well, we'll soon see that. So you thought you could take advantage of your poor wife, and borrow money on the security of her fortune, you rascal, did you? But just mark my words now, see if you aint caught in your own trap; for I'll sooner fling the money to the bottom of the Thames, than a single penny of it shall ever go to discharge that bond."

"All very fine, no doubt," said Launce, with the most provoking calmness, resulting from the knowledge of his own security, "but it is not yours to fling away. We should only have to draw it over again out of your own pocket."

"Ay, ay, just let me catch you drawing out of my pocket again, that's all!"

"Nobody wants," replied this pattern of a son, "and as for all the rest, I don't see what it matters to you, or what business it is of yours, for you lose nothing by it. You seem to treat me as if I wasn't a man."

"A man! a man, do you say? Don't talk to me of being a man, and yet resorting to these low, vile, scandalous ways of gratifying your appetites and your idleness, while the very woman you have robbed—yes, I say robbed—is left there in that miserable bed-room to cry her eyes out of her head while you sit here and get drunk."

"Then it's no more than you have been yourself every week of your life," returned Launce, "and are now at this instant. 'I never saw a man in such a deplorable state of intoxication in the whole course of my life. You can hardly hold your head above-board, you know you can't.'"

"Me drunk, you young vagabond! your father drunk?"

"Drunk as a lord! you know you can't untie your shoe-strings without getting them into a knot, nor stand on one leg while you pull your stocking off the other. Your own conscience tells you you can't. Besides, you don't talk as if you were sober, and I expect to see you carried off to Guy's Hospital to-morrow morning with an attack of delirium tremendous, if you go on drinking any more to-night."

"D rabbit that impudent tongue of yours, Launcy, I'll bring you to ruin at last, my boy! your father might have been a magpie or a raven—"

"So he is," gravely remarked Launce, "or else he wouldn't chatter and croak quite so much about other people's business."

"Do you mean to say, you willin, that I am a magpie and a raven?" savagely demanded Mr. Widge, senior.

"Yes, I do," said Launce, "and you ought to be sent to the Surrey Zoological. Your own corporation proves that you are one of the pie order."

"Don't crack your jokes on me, Launcy, I aint in a humor for them; and another thing, if you've forgotten your feelins of respect, remember we are talking on a subject that isn't either to be laughed or sneezed at. What scoundrelly Jew have you got that money from, tell me that?"

"No scoundrelly Jew at all, but a Mohamadan gent, a gent, I say, that wears his bed-gown in the day-time, and has made a fortune out of Turkey rhubarb."

"The greatest willin," exclaimed Gabriel, at mere hap hazard, "that ever breathed out of a hangman's noose!"

"No doubt," replied the son, "for I have heard say he has already ruined one gent—Mr. Thoroton, I believe—by lending him such enormous sums of money."

"More likely by borrowing and cheating, just as he will ruin you in the same way. And what interest do you pay—no trifle, by the lane of St Martin, I swear."

"Only fifty per cent. for six months."

"Fifty per—whe—ew—ew! Six months! Why, you're mad, Launce, stark, raging mad, drunken, crazy!"

"Then you should have afforded me a living yourself."

"It shall never be paid."

"It must."

"I say it shan't, for you shall sooner be sold up and sent to prison."

"Ask Mealy about that," said Launcy, "you can't keep her money as well as your own."

"She won't spend a penny on you."

"Oh, yes she will, when I want it."

"Then she's as big a fool as you are a rogue, my boy," exclaimed Mr. Widge, senior.

"Don't doubt that at all; but she'll stand to me, if it comes to that, nevertheless."

"Well, if that's your opinion, Launce, and you can still go on treating her in this manner, and throwing her money away like waste water, I've done with you, my boy, I've done with you. Not another word more; I'm satisfied. But let me tell you, before long you'll come to beg your bread."

"Not at your door," answered our hero, "I'd die first! You've married me, and then deserted me; think upon that, and see if it will comfort your dying pillow."

"Dying humbug! don't talk to me about dying pillars, but think of your own wife's pillar wet with tears of your making."

"Well, I'll have no more nonsense, pa, and that's flat. I'm out of your control: I shan't ask anybody to take me into their school to teach me what to do with my wife, and as you don't think proper to do me any good, I want none of your meddling nor advice, and none I'll have."

Gabriel looked ferocious, but said nothing; for finding he could not gain any advantage by opposition and recrimination, he felt it prudent to give in. And, now again for the second time, he began to wonder, whether he really had acted as wisely when he insisted on his son's marriage, as he at that time believed. To the prevalence of this doubt in his bosom, indeed, must be attributed his otherwise somewhat inexplicable and cowardly surrender. He did not, however, bid his son good-night without reminding him in a more than usually solemn strain, that if ever he should turn again to the right paths, the door of the paternal mansion still held a knocker whose smiling face would welcome him once more, as it had often and often welcomed him, in times gone by.

"Ah, Launcy, Launcy!" he said pathetically, "I was proud of you once. My old heart was all wrapped up in you, and I spared no expense to make you what you ought to be. You forget all this now, and treat me with shameful contempt; but if you should happen to live the longest, Launcy," and he laid his hand upon the shoulder of his son, "you will remember this night, my lad, with sorrow, and think that your doings helped to bring your old father to the grave, and that's poor consolation in a church-yard, very poor consolation, indeed!"

"Very likely," replied Launcy, "but you aint got there yet, and I fancy that jolly red nose of yours isn't particularly anxious to be off either, by the looks of it. Besides, I don't feel a bit pathetic to-night, so we'll leave it to talk about another time, please, pa."

Gabriel departed, while his son, after taking a brandy nightcap, and a soporific peep at his remaining sum of seven hundred pounds, crept off to rest as impenitent as ever.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ROBBERY.

LAUNCELOT had just reached his bedroom, when he was alarmed by a mysterious noise below stairs, which caused him to stagger back again. Three or four seconds brought him to the door of the suspected room. The passage was dark, but the inside of the apartment received a dim sort of illumination from a gas-lamp which stood at a respectful distance from the house-front. In ordinary times he could have seen his artistical skeleton hanging in dim horror from the ceiling; as it intersected the line between the door-way and one of the windows. It was now gone! Every thing was still. "They have stolen my skeleton," he thought; but just then he heard the bones rattle on the floor. Launce was frightened; Weigel's story of the picture—told in that very room—shot across his mind like an arrow. Perhaps the spirit had come back to fetch its own bones again! It must be so; for though he could not see it, he plainly heard it clattering and shaking as it crept along the floor towards him. He fled before it like an arrow; and having reached his bed-room, turned the lock, and hastened to get a light. Happily, lucifer-matches were at that time in common use, and the first that came to hand went off as it was warranted to do, but the brimstone was a terrible long time burning. Yet, even this was better than a flint; for Launce felt that had he been obliged to hammer away like a blacksmith over an old tinder-box—hitting out sparks, but never directing them to the right place, he must have dropped dead from terror on the spot.

"Oh, my dearest, what is it?" demanded a very faint voice; at which this dearest of men started, as though the skeleton had suddenly kicked him with its bony toes. He held his lamp up, and looked at the bed. Mrs. Widge was not there.

"Where are you, *my dear*?" he said.

It was the first time Amelia had heard that epithet applied to herself since they two were married, and it superseded all her terror. She rushed forward, crying out:

"Oh, call me that again, Launcy,—again,—again,—and never mind what has happened!"

"It's the skeleton creeping off!" he said, in a tremulous voice.

"I'll go!" she exclaimed with resolution, and at the same time snatching up the lamp. "Any thing now!—bones, or thieves, or death, no matter, if you will but love me!"

And so saying, she rushed out into the passage. The skeleton lay in a heap against the end window, and the figure of a man was for an instant visible. Instantly she raised a shrill cry of "Thieves, thieves!" which rang through the silent house like the high note of an organ. Then turning round towards her husband, who had crept within a yard behind her, she tottered forwards—the lamp was falling from her hands, but Launce had the courage to catch it. "Take me in," she said, and then Launce caught her also.

At that very time the whole house appeared to be suddenly converted into a kind of Cockney pandemonium. A long series of tremendous raps were given upon the lion's muzzle on the door,—enough, any watchman of sensibility and feeling might have thought, to knock his very iron teeth through the plank, and down that capacious throat, the passage behind. At the same instant Mrs. Neverdone and Jane rushed screaming up from the kitchen, almost buried in mob-cap and frilled bed-gown, "distracted to death," as they said, what to do or where to go, between front door and first-floor lodger.

Monsieur Mangolini just then shot down, and throwing back the bolts, let in a brace of black game which on the wastes of a London night is generally known to sportsmen under the name of "Charlies." One kept the passage while the other hurried up stairs, throwing his lantern about in order to examine every nook and corner. When its light fell on the skeleton, he started back, declaring in a loud voice, that the horrid murder had been committed that ever he seed in a winter's night. "This corp," he said, "must be took to th' next red lairp immediety;—and now what else is it?"

It very soon appeared that none of the artistic implements in the room, with the single exception of the skeleton, had been disturbed. And Launce began to congratulate himself, when the watchman's light shot into a corner by the fire-place, where stood an old carved piece of oaken furniture, which he had once purchased at a sale on the recommendation of Stretcher, that "it was the greatest natural curiosity he had ever seen." In the heart of hearts of this antique, Launce had deposited his money. It was broken open; the cash was all gone, and the unhappy son of Gabriel dropped in a fit on the carpet! Launce's decanters still stood upon the table, and the opportunity thus afforded for a comfortable swig, unknown to him, was immediately seized upon by both the watchmen and Mangolini, without a word being spoken or scarcely a look exchanged. The faculty of seizure in this parti-

cular case seemed instinctive. One took it for the laudable purpose of keeping the night air out of an old man's stomach, and the other because he too well knew if he did not take it in that way he should very seldom take it at all. The fact was that poor Mangolini danced so very few ladies and gentlemen who regularly footed up much cash, that a dinner at the eating-house too frequently became to him a mere visionary bliss—one chop was his chief corner-stone—while through the arid region of his stomach, very rarely flowed one of those little brandy-colored streams, upon which many poets float to many imaginary immortalities.

After the watchman had supplied his brother below with a very lordly dose, though not equal to the one he had himself swallowed, he found time, assisted by Mangolini, to attend to Launce, who had not yet recovered from his swoon. They first applied the brandy-stopper to his nose; but finding that ineffectual, and being withal desirous not to additionally alarm the women by asking for hartshorn, they took one of his own pencils of a convenient size, and having dipped it in half a wine glass of the same spirit, fell to anointing the interior of the same valuable organ therewith with a delicacy and precision of touch which would have astonished even Launce himself could he but have seen it. An additional drop poured down his throat had the effect in a short time of producing the consequences desired.

When the search was renewed, the place of entrance and exit of the chief actors in this tragi-comedy was soon traced out by the united aids of watch intellect and of whale oil; but beyond that these great and petty equal lights could not go. The up-stairs watchman, however, insisted on having the "corp" removed, in order to a prospective coroner's inquest being held upon it, as he still persisted in asserting his belief that murder had often been discovered by the finding of bones, and that the present was a case "exactly in pint." Eventually, however, this difficulty was with difficulty overcome; the guardians of the night departed, Mangolini partially staggered as he went up to his room, and actually treated himself to a dance before his own looking-glass ere he finally got into bed.

Launce had no sooner entered his bed-room, in the grate of which yet lingered a little fire, than he fell into an easy chair and began in the most uneasy manner to groan at a rate highly alarming, and dreadful to hear. His wife flew to him at the same moment, inquired, coaxed, persuaded, and looked marvellously affrighted. "Do let me alone!" exclaimed the patient, peevishly.

"Humph! If that is all I get," replied she, with affected warmth, "I *must* let you alone." "Why, don't you see," shouted Launce, sa-

vagely, "that they've took every pound I had except what's in my pocket; there's seven hundred clean gone; in two or three months I shall have fifteen hundred to pay, including interest, and haven't the look-out of a single sixpence! Aint it enough to drive one mad?"

Amelia stood mute with astonishment. Seven hundred pounds stolen! She did not know there was a tenth part of that sum in their possession, and fifteen hundred to pay shortly! How upon earth had he contracted such a debt? A world of profligate horrors which he had never passed through, opened suddenly to her view: and then, as a matter of course as well as of necessity, she began to lament in a very audible manner, though without uttering a word of either inquiry or reproach.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GABRIEL READS HIS SON A FEW HEADS FOR A MORAL ESSAY, AND CONCLUDES WITH A VERY SAD ANNOUNCEMENT, — RICHARD STRETCHER COMES IN AS COMFORTER WITH AN ASTOUNDING PROPOSAL.

WHEN, on the following morning the young husband and wife, whom we left the previous night, as all late visitors ought to leave, at the proper moment, entered to a very late breakfast, they found Mr. Gabriel Widge already in the room, with the newspaper in his hand, and waiting their appearance.

Having addressed his daughter-in-law after his usual cordial manner, he turned towards his son, who to say the truth, was ashamed to look his father in the face, and expressed himself as follows:

"Now, Launcy, you didn't expect to see me here this mornin', I know. Nor I didn't intend to come again in a hurry, but to disband you entirely until you had sat on the stool of repentance for about a month or so together. But I see by my paper this mornin' that you have had a visitation of Providence last night. It says here, 'Early this morning, a most daring and extensive robbery was committed on the premises of Mrs. Neverdone, — Street, by the forcible entry of some diabolical scoundrels through a back window, on to the first floor, occupied by Mr. Widge, a young artist of some name (at the British Museum). A desk was broken open, and cash to a large amount carried away. We cannot give particulars, as the burglary took place only shortly before our paper was put to press. No clue has been obtained to the miscreants, but the police are, as usual, unusually active in their search.' Is this true, Launcy?"

"I am sorry to say it is, pa."

"Then I will tell you what, my boy: it's a judgment on you,—it's a stone put before your wheel to stop your career, and hinder you from smashing yourself to pieces against a lamp-post, or knocking your brains out on a kerb-stone! I've come up to tell you I am glad on't—very glad. Your father was never better pleased in his life: and all for your own good! You know that money was badly come by, and money so got is sure to burn a hole in the puss it's put in. But you despised me last night,—you used your tongue more like a country wiper than a London-bred and well educated son. Launcy, you owe me a night's sleep, my boy; and more trouble in my eyes than ever I could have thought you would, consider'n' how I have brought you up, and what money I have spent on you——"

The old man stopped suddenly short here, and "Mealy" as suddenly burst into a violent fit of crying.

"Don't cry, Mealy," said Gabriel, faintly, "it's of no use, my gal, for if he'll not listen to me, I'm sartin he'll care nothing about your tears, if you soak him through wi' them. What say you, Launcy? Do you mean to scour your pot a bit cleaner, and put a little more shine on yourself than you have done lately? Or do you mean to go on gettin' blacker and blacker, till at last of all nobody but th' hangman and th' divel can see you?"

"I reckon I can try," replied Launce, very sulkily; "but I don't see how anybody can mend much, when he's only th' work'us or Whitecross Street afore him!"

"All your own doings, my boy,—remember that!"

"No, 'taint, pa."

"No, 'taint, no, 'taint, do you say? I'll tell you what, Launcy, if you don't get over that horrid spirit of contradiction of yours it 'll prove th' ruin of both your body and your vital spark. It'll not do, my boy, in this world, to be always fancying yourself like a clean snowball in a soot-bag, becous we all lick up some black or other as we roll along, and you as much as any body. Now just cast your eyes down and see to what a hedge of a precipice you have brought yourself! Look if another stride or two in the same direction will not pitch you head-first into a quagmire of misery, dragging after you one or two more beings that you ought instead to carry up the mountain of life. Don't you see it? I hardly know now whether you a'int going to tumble in; but you may depend on one thing, Launcy, I shan't do any more for you at present. I have nailed myself to that post, and there I shall stay till I see you doing better for yourself."

Launcy began to sob like a man suddenly dropped into cold water, but he did not just then allow his eyes to grow moist.

"You may think," continued Gabriel, "that I am very hard, but it is all for your own good; and depend upon it, my boy, it is harder for me to do it, a deal harder, God knows, than it is for you to bear it!"

And here Gabriel pretended to wipe his nose, though it clearly appeared to be only another way of blowing the tears out of his eyes.

Perhaps the old gentleman might have had something more to say, had not an interruption now occurred by the announcement, followed closely by the entrance of Mr. Richard Stretcher.

"Ah, Widge, my man, called to see how do-to-day. Headache? low spirits? half dead? Not surprised at all, not in the least. Well, I've heard of your disaster—just glanced over it at my coffee-rooms, as I was taking breakfast. Well, I suppose you're cleaned out, riddled clear, of course? But, I say—"

Mr. Gabriel Widge just then walked out with his daughter, as he said he wished to have a little conversation with her privately.

Launce felt mightily relieved by the timely appearance of his friend, and instantly assuming a much more cheerful aspect than heretofore, briefly communicated the whole matter to him.

"Exactly so, exactly so!" exclaimed Stretcher; "just to a hair's-breadth what I expected. But never heed your father, nor any thing he does. I can help you, if you will but help me. The thing is easily done, if you can but swallow a good stiff poker of confidence in me, and do as I advise you. The instant I glanced at the paragraph, I knew what would be the result. At least I may say I knew, because I never yet found reason to doubt the accuracy of my spontaneous judgment upon any occurrence of difficulty, during the whole of my career. I knew you would want a friend; I knew you would be dead-locked for money. While I chewed my chop, I proposed this to myself: 'I will go down to Widge's,—just ascertain whether he and the old boy stand on the same level after last night's unpleasantness, as before; or whether one is at the top of the steps, and the other at the bottom. In the latter case I have a certain proposition to make. And if you agree to it, Widge,—as I entertain not the shadow of a doubt you will,—before those bonds of yours have to be redeemed, I shall be enabled to lend you a couple of thousand of pounds, without saying a word, either to the old gentleman or your wife upon the subject!'"

Mr. Launcelot looked astonished bodily, but in spirit he grasped at the offer in an instant, even without knowing a single tittle of the means by which his friend proposed to make it good.

"My plan, Widge, is this. But before I begin, hand out your cigars, and send Betty for a pot of arf-an'-arf. The plan I propose, Widge, is to be something of this sort. You want money, so do I. You have a wife,

Richard Stretcher has not yet entered into the holy estate of wedlock. Your wife has a sister, who, I dare say, is passing her time very unhappily; she must be a sort of nun in the convent of her own house. Now if there be one creature more deserving a man's sympathy than another, it must be that delightful creature, a grown up young woman—willing probably to wed, but without an eligible opportunity; who is doomed to pass months and months of her time in peeping between the flower pots in the window, or just over the edge of the curtain, at the crowds of nice young men, steady looking, and with goodly formed foreheads, who are continually passing along the street, and yet without beholding a single soul whom the manners of the day will thus allow to try his congeniality with her own! Unfortunately, I have never yet enjoyed an opportunity of being introduced to any young lady moving in that sphere of life to which I rather flatter myself I am entitled to look up for a companion. Now, Widge, just between our two selves, you are the very man to do this for me. The opportunity you enjoy is as open as an oyster-tub, and I am of opinion that Miss Josey Chuckchin, if she only had the opportunity of cultivating my acquaintance, would not eventually refuse to become Mrs. Stretcher. What think you, my boy?"

"Sure I can't tell," replied Launce, "wimmin is wimmin, and there's no telling what they mayn't do. She might or she mightn't—that's what I think about. But if she did, Dick, what then?"

"Don't let me call you blind," exclaimed Richard, "because you *are* my best friend, and *may* become my brother-in-law! But open your eyes a moment. Upon my honor, you must see that if she did accept me, I should be under the necessity of accepting her fortune as well as herself. Out of that I could at once relieve you from all difficulties, and at the same time, perhaps, not do myself any dishonor, or pecuniary mischief."

Stretcher here drank half of the "arf-an'-arf" at once; and having afterwards taken breath, resumed—

"As a matter of course, Widge, you will see at once that there is, at least, as much friendship as selfishness in me. Unless this disaster had happened to you, I should never have dreamed of any such wild speculation—for wild it does seem, even to myself. But friendship, my dear fellow, friendship is the all-in-all of life. Acquaintance is agreeable—love is charming; but refined, exalted friendship is as everlasting as the heavens. Yes!" he continued, after emptying the pewter; "love is apt to fade with the object that produced it, and die a natural death in the fires of its own raising; but give me the man whose pocket, like my own, is as open as a market

basket—and who looks on his friend as his own best right hand!—Widge, send for another drop of arf-an'-arf."

"I don't see how we can work it," observed Launcelot

"Easy enough, my fine fellow!—Afford the chance, and leave all the rest to your friend Richard. In the course of a month or so, I shall be able to enslave her, and no mistake;—she will be dying for me"

Mr. Widge, junior, felt at first sadly puzzled. The difficulties of his own position, however—the continued persuasions of a very silly young man—and the temptation itself, foolish as it may seem, eventually combined to induce him to agree that the attempt should at least be made.

"That one word," cried Richard, "has sealed your independence again! It has done me the highest earthly honor of a plebeian nature, and made of us both, to say the very least, the 'shadows cast before' at this present moment, of the gentlemen we shall shortly be!"

And with the expression of this exalted opinion of his friend's and his own coming importance, Stretcher invited Launce to take a stroll with him to the Museum, just by way of diverting his mind from the objects which now oppressed it. Mr. Widge was always ready, in season or out of season, to accept invitations from that source; and, accordingly, might very soon have been seen wending his way in the direction of Great Russell Street.

Meantime, and while all this was proceeding in the painting-room, Mr. Gabriel Widge was advising with his daughter respecting her husband elsewhere. What was the peculiar nature of his communications with her we cannot just now discover; but two facts were evident—one that the lady was left in considerable distress of mind, while the redoubtable Gabriel trudged homeward with the briskness of a lawyer's clerk one quarter too late for his office, and with an expression of countenance which seemed not unequivocally to intimate that another triumph of his peculiar genius in the management of an equally able son, might ere long be made manifest to the world.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. JUNO WIDGE AND MR. GABRIEL HERCULES AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY; WITH A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN MR. CULLODEN AND MR. SNOWDON, TWO ARTISTS OF CELEBRITY IN THEIR OWN OPINIONS.

A CERTAIN recollection of vast importance happened suddenly to light up in Stretcher's

brain, as he and Launce were turning the corner of Oxford street.

"Why, Widge, my man, 'pon my honor, this very day is Varnishing day! Your Hercules is admitted, and you *must* go and touch up a little."

"Quite forgot it," replied Launce, "though I remembered it yesterday. These late events has drove my head distracted. But I can't do any thing, so it's no use in going."

"Pooh, pooh!" replied Stretcher, "we'll turn back and fetch your materials, and go you shall. Excuse me, but my almost superhuman friendship for you compels me to demand imperatively that you must go, and do justice to your own immortal works. That Hercules may be the making of you. What should you think of a tidy five hundred for it, my boy? Purchased by Lord Lollypop, and so forth. Come along!"

So Launce consented, and eventually appeared at the Academy.

Now, by all the nobility and gentry in town, as well as by the editors and subs of magazines and newspapers, it is well known that "private view" day at the Royal Academy is a very great and important day indeed. The common herd of picture-gazers also equally well know that the finest "Exhibition day" is a day scarcely inferior in point of interest and grandeur; but we must inform the reader that there is yet another day in the yearly history of that institution which perfectly eclipses the glory of either of the former two. "Varnishing day," as it is technically called, is that fractional point of time to which we allude. It is a day set apart, after the arrangement and hanging of the pictures, for the exhibitors to examine, varnish, or retouch their respective works, in case they shall so think fit; it being an ordinary thing for a picture that looked almost perfection itself while in the painter's own study, to appear suddenly dull, tame, chalky, foxy, common-place, and unfinished when placed in contrast with the glowing harvest of many-colored acres spread around. While, on the other side, the glaring crudities that outrage nature and almost put out a spectator's eyes when looked upon in a private room, gain much undue influence over their more sober and quaker-like superiors upon the Academy walls, and compel them in self-defence to add to the shine of their broadcloth, polish up their buttons, flake whiten their shirt-collars, and resort to a little extra rouge for that especial occasion. On this all-important day, too, a whole legion of little imps are let loose out of Tartarus by Mesdames Jealousy and Detraction, one or more of which might readily be discerned perched upon each artist's nose, with a claw in either eye, or perhaps bestriding his shoulders and holding a spiritual pair of very strong green magnifying spectacles, before his

optics, whereby the animalcule-like faults of the greatest artists are rendered as large, monstrous, and disgusting as ever were the microscopic tenants of a drop of rural ditch-water upon the twenty-four feet disc of the Polytechnic Institution, in Regent street. Oddly enough, the largest demons of this kind take a perverse sort of pleasure in mounting the backs of the least and most contemptible artists,—so that it is not unusual to see a great multitude thereof almost bent double, and literally staggering beneath their overgrown riders. On “varnishing day,” in fact, Pandemonium holds a regular jubilee in painters’ brains and bosoms, and does its utmost to work them up into scenes similar to the one Mr. Launcelot Widge was about to behold on the day in question. Happily, however, to the credit of the profession be it said, matters very seldom reach this desperate and fierce extremity.

Launcelot had transmitted two pictures to the council for that season’s exhibition, one of which was a portrait of his mother in the character of Juno, with a hawk and a goose on a perch behind her, and a large well-displayed peacock at her feet. The clouds upon which she was seated, he had imitated from various voluminous little puffs of gunpowder which he continually let off at the foot of the three-legged stool on which she sat; the goose his father purchased for the occasion at the village of a dirty Brentford, having selected it out of a farm-yard flock for its especial good looks—keeping an eye at the same time on the fine dish it would afterwards make for the table in St. Martin’s-lane; while the hawk and the peacock were accurate representations of two stuffed and faded specimens which he hired for the purpose at a broker’s shop in a by-street in Soho. This picture, much to Mrs. Widge’s mortification, was refused admission,—partly, we believe, because the painter had not, in the memorable words of Mr. Griesback, “grasped the whole universal frame” sufficiently to know that geese did not roost on perches, and partly because Mrs. Widge’s own lean and tartaric-acid physiognomy conveyed too remote a notion of the charms of Jupiter’s most charming sister. Although that lady herself (we mean Mrs. Widge, not Juno) attributed the refusal entirely to Launcy’s wretched talents; for her provocation at the odious gunpowder she had undergone, and the everlasting sittings she had endured for nothing, was great indeed. But what contributed to render her considerably more “wrathy” on the occasion was, that a portrait of Mr. Gabriel Widge, her husband, of exactly the same size, and intended (as it ought to be) for a companion of hers, obtained the sanction of the “hanging committee,” and might stand out the gaze of gaping thousands during the run of a whole brilliant season. In this classical pro-

duction, Gabriel, the short and stout, was represented as Hercules strangling the serpents.

The happiness of this adaptation of modern life with ancient heroism was far superior to the former, since both Mr. Widge, senior, and his son saw clearly, that as Hercules must have been a very big boy, a small, rotund man like Mr. Widge could not fail, when juvenilized a little, to make an admirable model for the hero. This magnificent effort then of Launcelot’s pencil gained him admission to the exhibition rooms on “varnishing day.”

Dressed in a splendid suit, and with his hair so liberally oiled that the unctuous fluid almost stood in trickled beads at the ends of his would be curls, Launce entered the rooms, his eager mind demanding in almost audible accents, “Where is my Hercules?” for to him it appeared as though the exhibition contained nothing else but his Hercules, and that the world of London would come to stare, and marvel at nothing else throughout the summer. He darted directly into the great room first, of course, but on looking round could see every thing else except his Hercules. Yes, there were landscapes, and portraits, and histories, and poeticals, but no classical from his ambitious easel.

“How’s this!” he thought, as he passed into the next room, and again into the next, and the next after that, without fixing his eyes upon the ardently sought picture at last. At length he penetrated into a small and dark cell, where scarcely anything except the window was visible, and there, after his pupils had enlarged almost to the extent of an owl’s, and thus enabled him to distinguish hitherto hidden objects through the gloom, he discovered “his Hercules” about twenty feet high; at the very top, close in a corner, and with the ornaments of his frame pushed off against the ceiling.

“Thousand furies,” he exclaimed, “if this be bringing genius before the public, the council may go to—”

We cannot exactly say what destiny, for on hearing these exclamations of injured and indignant talent, six or eight other wonderful artists, who were similarly circumstanced, but whom he had not hitherto observed in the surrounding obscurity, instantly joined in with a violent chorus of execration; during which they swore never to patronize the Academy again, vowed it was time and materials thrown away, and solemnly pledged their respective honors that they would sooner drink the bottles of varnish, and swallow the bladders of pigment they had brought, than lay a single drop or a bit more on their respective pictures.

Having thus, as it were, at one hasty and fatal blow annihilated all hopes of the welfare of the establishment for the future, they were suddenly and simultaneously seized with an irresistible desire to sing, and accordingly broke

out as one man into the following piece arranged for nine voices :

SONG OF THE PAINTERS.

Away with your mastic and copal,
Your smearings and glazings, for hark!
'Tis like putting a glass on an opal
To varnish good things for the dark!

However, in future more valiant,
Like fire-flies we'll carry a light,
Hung out on the tails of our talent,
To show up our beauties by night!

Scarcely had the "divine afflatus" departed out of their bodies, when sounds of war issued from an adjoining room, and, on rushing to the scene of contention, Launcelot beheld two artists of high celebrity in their respective families, hotly engaged in a contest of words, which clearly foreboded the more real fight that was close at hand. But since we feel it incumbent upon us to follow the example set in the despatches of all great generals, and describe the position of the belligerents before the battle commences, be it remarked that Mr. Culloden, a painter of history, was exalted upon the topmost eminence of a flight of portable steps, to the height of about ten feet from the floor; while his mortal enemy, Mr. Snowdon, a painter of landscape, occupied the flat immediately below. Each valued himself inestimably upon his astonishing powers of coloring, Mr. Culloden painting flesh of every hue, from that of mother-of-pearl to that of a bay gelding, and Mr. Snowdon depicting skies too brilliant for the sun himself to imitate successfully, and landscapes so gloriously wild and rich in positive colors, that not one spectator in ten could make out whether sea, air, fire, or water, was intended to predominate. He was, however, a great man, and so was Culloden: both were great men, very great; too great, indeed to suffer each other to be outdone in greatness, and consequently each was firmly resolved to outdo the other in the splendor of his work. Their pictures happened, rather spitefully, to be hung together; and during the whole morning had they been painting against each other with desperate ferocity. For awhile not a word had been exchanged between them; as often as Culloden's pencil laid on a more bright vermilion, green, or blue, so surely did Snowdon's follow the example, and thus giving stroke for stroke, and look for look, they waged silent warfare, until at length the force of colors could go no further, and both gave in, simply because the ammunition was found ineffectual to reduce either. At this critical point, Culloden believed that Snowdon had beaten him at his own weapons, while Snowdon as sincerely conceded the same honor to Mr. Culloden. They stared at each other frightfully: and at

last grinned outright and made horrible faces, in token of mutual hate and detestation. Both were terribly frightened, and as white as fear, operating upon their tanned and antique skins, could make them. At length, the following dialogue ensued.

"Beast!" ejaculated Culloden.

"Scum!" replied Snowdon.

"Filth!" said Culloden.

"Spawn!" answered Snowdon.

"Dirt!" rejoined Culloden.

"Slaver!" cried Snowdon.

Then at it they went pell-mell. Each was armed with a stiff brush nearly two yards long, for the purpose of painting at a distance, and with these for spears and a large oval palette on each left thumb by way of shield, they tilted at each other in a style worthy of the chivalry of the Earl of Eglintoun's tournament. During at least the first quarter of an hour both combatants hopped and skipped about so much, that neither received a single thrust, except upon the palette, though there indeed were signs of heavy work, for each thus mixed up and amalgamated the other's colors in frightful confusion. Mr. Culloden, though evidently the least experienced fencer of the two, at length had the felicity of effecting a thrust precisely upon his antagonist's proboscis (which by the by was nearly as large as an Irish potato), and leaving thereon a splendid patch of vermilion. This raised a prodigious laugh amongst the young dandy artists and the old clever slovens who had gathered around, which so irritated Snowdon that he immediately rushed forwards to close upon Culloden, and would infallibly have painted him up and thrashed him too with the shaft of his weapon, had not that gentleman fairly turned and fled up his step-ladder, while Snowdon plied him vigorously behind, ornamenting his white pantaloons with large patches of Prussian blue and burnt sienna.

In attempting, however, to scale the heights after him, the stairs gave way altogether; Culloden was precipitated into the very middle of Snowdon's landscape, and both fell together on the ground. Hard fisticuffs would now have followed, had not the bystanders interfered. Both warriors were carried down stairs, decently deposited each in a hackney-coach, and conveyed to their respective domiciles.

The painter of the Hercules was nevertheless in a worse case than either of them. He felt that all the world had suddenly conspired to crush him out of existence: not only to rob him of what he had, but to prevent him from ever getting any more. He mentally anathematized all the members of the institution; he cursed the council; denounced the hanging committee; he rushed down stairs in an agony; he grinned at that most valuable individual, Jackson, the porter, as he passed, and finally

made his exit from the arcade with much the same feeling as his prototype Timon did when he quitted Athens. Nay, had he not been restrained by the overpowering sense of the value of a new coat, it is not impossible but that he might, in his heroic enthusiasm, have taken off his upper garment, and dashed it indignantly at the Academy door.

"Oh, Launcy dear, I am so glad you have come back so soon, for I am very miserable indeed!" cried his wife, as this poor embodiment of disappointment's self entered the room.

"Needn't be glad to see me," replied Launce; "I've no consolation to give you above swallowing a file of pison. I'm as miserable myself as a crimped cod-fish, for my hopes gets worse and worse every hour."

"What, worse news yet?" replied his wife, at the same time beginning to cry by anticipation.

"They've hung up my Hercules in a corner of a closet where a bat or a owl couldn't see it without a lantern; and yet Stretcher thinks it should have fetched two hundred. Well; they'll soon put me where nobody can see me, and then my Hercules and me will be both alike, that's all!"

And here Mr. Widge made an ineffectual attempt to hang his coat up temporarily on the top of his easel, and kicked a couple of canvases out of the way that chanced to be near, though not in *his* way. He then inquired what his father had been talking about behind his back.

Now, Amelia considered that the vow to love, honor, and obey, made at the altar, was not a thing of words for that occasion alone. She held that neither poverty nor sickness should lessen her love; nay, that if any thing, they should increase it, as being then the only treasure her husband could have left. It was her fixed opinion that, however much his sentiments and feelings might differ from her own, they must never cause her for a moment to dishonor him. While as for her obedience, she esteemed it, if possible, more important than either of the other two; as she reflected that to obey was to produce continual peace,—to disobey was inevitably to lead to disagreement, and eventually to misery. No two in the married state can both be masters, and be happy. She, therefore, wiped her eyes, and with a few preparatory sobs, began.

"Father said first of all, that he would not see you go on so any longer, and that my property should not be wasted in that manner any more than his own. He said, if you persisted in it, it would be all the worse for yourself in the end, as he should never leave you more than a shilling in his will. Besides many more things that I cannot remember just now. But I persuaded him all I could, and at last he agreed that if things mended by the time your

money was due, we should find him just the same Gabriel as he had ever been before. Was not that kind, my dear?"

"Remarkably kind," replied Launce, ironically; "very; wonderful, humph—Well, no matter. I don't care what he does, for let me tell you, Mealy, my good friend, Richard Stretcher, is going to get me out of the hobble with his own hands. There's for you! What do you think of that?"

"Stretcher! What in the world can he do?"

"Don't say another word about it, becos I shan't anser any more questions. Besides, we may recover the money yet when the thieves are catch'd——"

"They never will be," observed the lady.

"Never, what! How do you know?" demanded Launce, with some surprise.

"I *can't* say why I believe so," answered she, "but I am sure they never will."

"That's just like all you wimmin," said her husband, "you're always so sure about things as you know nothin' about, and the more you know nothin' about 'em the more surer you get."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IS LIKE A SEA-BISCUIT, DRY AND SHORT, BUT BOTH VERY NECESSARY AND VERY GOOD UNTIL BETTER CAN BE HAD.

It is needful in this place to quit, during a brief period, the proceedings of Launcelot and his friends, and to return to the fortunes of some other personages whom we have too long neglected.

That young Mr. Hollis was no fool, I confess to be my candid opinion; though no reasonable doubt can be entertained but that he will so be considered by the vast majority of my sapient fellow-creatures, in whose intelligent opinions no better evidence of folly can be adduced, than the fact that a man should sacrifice his worldly interest for the empty purpose of following the bent of his own inclination in the vain pursuit of what he may ridiculously consider a high and noble branch of a very noble profession. What! actually refuse to make money—getting his day-thought, his night-dream, the sole main-end of his very valuable life, merely to paint pictures for people who come after him to profit by? He must be a fool,—the essence of half-a-dozen common ones extracted from the still of fatuity itself.

And a fool I suppose he must have been enrolled, had it not happened, good usurers, that since you last heard of him, the goddess of Perseverance, under whose tutelage he placed him-

self, had rewarded her student's application and genius by raising him considerably from his previous lowly condition, and also by further promising him an additional crown of grace in the person of the pretty Christabel Sylverthorne!

The truth of the matter was this. The picture he had painted for the lady of Woodhouselee "turned out," as those sad scoundrels the picture-dealers say, to be a very fine work indeed for so young an artist. It must have been a pathetic piece, for the fair owner thereof broke instantaneously into tears when her eyes fell upon it. Nay, she even covered her face with her hands, and turned away, and never looked again until another sun shone beautifully out upon it and her.

And Christabel also thought it very wonderful,—she liked the little angel above all things, and she told Mr. Hollis so; whereupon that young gentleman blushed, and did not speak his thoughts; a marvellous fact, which made Miss Christabel blush yet more deeply, and dread within herself that she had unconsciously committed herself, though in what manner it was beyond the power of her young heart to discover. However, as soon as she could speak, which was just after Mr. Hollis had said some bungling stuff about "feeling flattered," and all that, just as artists invariably do when their works are praised—when, I repeat, her fluttering but guiltless bosom would allow her again to speak, she suddenly forgot the angel, and very highly praised the draperies, and the "deep old gloom" of the apartment, as well as the painting of the faces of the Thorotons, though she did not like the expression of either of them, not in the least.

"They are very natural, sir," she remarked, "but very disagreeable: I ought not to say so, perhaps, only to you—I may, Mr. Hollis. I think them very much like the originals."

And the sly but most expressive turn which the fair speaker gave to the last sentiment told far more than the words themselves.

"They are a mysterious couple," she continued, "and I never like mystery of that kind; there is seldom any good in it. This is my feeling, though I may be wrong."

"I am entirely of your opinion, Miss Sylverthorne," answered Hollis, "and I can tell you something which would make them appear still more strange, because I know I can confide in you. I never found heart," pursued the painter, "to mention it to Lady Lavinia, though the circumstance struck me very forcibly when first I had the honor of waiting upon her ladyship and beheld *that* picture."

His eyes were turned towards the portrait of Sir Stephen, and a slight inclination of the head pointed it out as the object of his remark.

"And what was it, Mr. Hollis?"

"That the miniature worn by Mrs. Thoroton is a portrait of the same gentleman, and was once in my possession."

"In your possession, Mr. Hollis? Indeed! It is singular enough. But do tell me how you obtained it; for I am sure nobody, except herself, ever knew that it was lost."

Hollis felt rather embarrassed, as he admitted having made the purchase thereof at a pawnbroker's shop in Long Acre; though, rather by way of qualifying such a vulgar act, he added that he did so because he saw it would afford him an excellent study.

"And how," demanded Christabel, "came the Thorotons to know you had it?"

"Quite accidentally. Several weeks after the purchase of it, a gentleman called upon me one day, and stated his desire that I should make a copy of a miniature, which he then produced and showed me. To my astonishment, it was precisely similar to the one I had so recently bought at the pawnbroker's. I informed him that I could supply him with its exact counterpart, without the trouble of making one; which I did; and never, Miss Sylverthorne, did I see any man's countenance change so suddenly as did his at that sight. He then fixed his eyes on me, then upon the picture again; and then he asked very earnestly where I had it from, or whether it had been mine *all my life*. I told him all about the matter, upon which he appeared relieved, and almost involuntarily said something like, *then he must be dead*, but I am not quite certain of the words. He repurchased it of me, told me it was lost by a lady years ago, and promised to patronize me for the future to the best of his ability. That man was Mr. Thoroton. He concluded by giving me an invitation to dine with him; and my earliest visit was on that occasion, when I had first the pleasure—of—the—"

"Come, come, sir!" exclaimed Christabel, in a sprightly manner, "now do not spoil a very wonderful story with a piece of nonsense at the end. You seem to be lost in your subject; let me recollect now—you left off somewhere about when you had taken dinner, I think."

"I have told you all, Miss Sylverthorne," replied Hollis, pensively.

"I regret the telling of it has made you so sad, but never heed it now. Do oblige me by looking at this flower instead. And as you are a judge of colors, and lights and shades, give me your opinion. It is mine,—Lady Lavinia gave it me this morning, because I took an odd fancy to it. Now, Mr. Hollis, look at it this way,—what do you think of it?"

"Nothing, Christabel," he replied, "when you are here—everything when you are gone?"

"Oh, fie, fie! But you painters are a bold race, and so must be forgiven, I suppose; or

what *should* I not say to you? But never repeat your own poetry to me again, because I feel assured that painting is itself a quite sufficient vocation for one mind."

Hollis protested he had not repeated a single word of poetry of his own, because he had never written any.

"Oh, that is of no consequence!" exclaimed Christabel; "the books tell us that poetry is poetry still, whether written or spoken. And if you have never written any, pray never do, and especially upon any one with whom you may chance to be acquainted. It might be considered libellous, since dishonest praise is equally so with speaking all the truth. I have read greater libels upon ladies' faces, for which no action was brought, than ever I did amongst all those in which certain ugly men obtained very handsome damages. But did you ever ascertain, Mr. Hollis, where, or rather from whom, the pawnbroker had this little picture?"

"Never," he answered, "but I should presume that as it evidently went out of this family, either it was lost, as Mr. Thoroton said, and was picked up by some poor starving creature, and sold for a trifle; or that it was stolen, perhaps by a servant, and pledged without any intention of being redeemed again."

"It is very strange," said the lady, "and ought to be inquired into. Shall I consider myself at liberty to mention the subject elsewhere?"

"Pardon me, Miss Christabel, it is impossible for me to deny you any request, however great; and yet I am afraid."

"Mr. Hollis!" exclaimed his companion, "I see what you would say; perhaps I can guess at your motives. From this moment the conversation that has passed is buried with me as securely as the dead in a grave."

Hollis was about to reply in most heroic fashion, when the Lady of Woodhouselee just then entered; and exactly at the point of time to see the hand of Miss Sylverthorne hastily withdrawn from that of the young and gifted artist.

Remarkably enough, after the lapse of a minute or two, not a single individual of the three appeared to have the most remote recollection of the occurrence of this very natural incident. The Lady Lavinia had not, of course, seen any thing; Miss Sylverthorne had merely extended her hand a little way—a privilege which she certainly enjoyed equally with all other young ladies upon the face of this loving and loveable earth; while Mr. Hollis felt fully confident that it is one of the most natural and indisputable of the rights of man (especially of the young man) to press a softer hand than his own, whenever fortune may place one legitimately within his reach.

Such was the first brief avowal of certain very tender sentiments, mutually felt, I believe,

by this young couple, which were not disapproved by officious friends, and that eventually resulted in a very confident attachment.

Subsequently, the Lady of Woodhouselee exerted much of her influence in recommending her protégée to highly serviceable, if not the most highly distinguished, patronage. To be sure he was at times under the necessity of becoming what Hogarth ludicrously termed a "phizmonger," but for that he cared little. What was it but the same as far greater had done before him? What is it now but the last resort of many an able genius in a much higher branch of his profession, in order to keep the revenue of the quarter up to that mark, which will enable him to maintain at least appearances, if not actual comforts, adequate to his station?

The bare stick of Mr. Thoroton's promised patronage, to which Mr. Hollis above alluded, had not yet—nor, in fact, did it ever afterwards—put forth a single bud. A fact not to be wondered at when we learn that from time to time his possessions were still farther lessened by the extortions of Saul, who had additionally strengthened his hold upon him by communicating to that desperate and unhappy man his knowledge of the finding of those infant remains—knowledge, indeed, public enough, but which he alone knew how to make use of. True enough, Mr. Thoroton reflected very justly that a newly-born infant must long before that time have perished beyond all human recognition, when laid barely in the corroding earth; but yet fear made him distrustful even of the very truth upon which his mind sought to repose itself. There was still a doubt, a sort of *it might be* lingering upon his conscience, which made him eventually still more the dupe and the victim than he had been hitherto. And equally certain it is, that Mrs. Thoroton had over and over again exercised all her eloquence to persuade him to consent to remove to some continental retirement in order to avoid the demands of Saul, before all their fortunes were frittered away, and they were left at last with nothing else to give. But the stern temper and high spirit of her husband caused him to scorn this advice, until it became absolutely impracticable on any such scale as alone he could possibly have been at any time induced to attempt it. The natural consequence of this pride, stubbornness, or whatever other failing it might be, was—that by this time there was nothing left him but the external show, the mere painted shell of that wealth and dignity which, in former and more innocent times, he had so abundantly enjoyed. And, perhaps, to a man cast in such a mould, no reflection of the mind could produce such agony of heart as that which now day and night pervaded Mr. Thoroton's bosom: that by the very same means adopted to obtain too much, he had been

made the instrument, by his own hands, of losing that which he had really and legitimately possessed.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. HOLLIS RELATES THE ADVENTURES OF HIS EARLY LIFE, AND GIVES SOME ACCOUNT THEREIN OF THE PROGRESSES AND DEATHS OF MR. SLAB, THE HOUSE-PAINTER, AND MISS REBECCA BLISS, HIS HOUSE-KEEPER.

SOME long time after the scene described in the preceding chapter, the same three individuals there introduced were sitting together one evening near, or rather around, a fine old oriel window, in the same apartment of the same old manor-house of Woodhouselee.

As the sun departed, the chit-chat of the afternoon had died away. Twilight seemed to pour its natural silence, if not its gloom, upon each heart; nor was it until dark shadows began to hide the remoter end of the room, that Christabel suddenly exclaimed, as though just aroused from a reverie,

"How very silent and serious we all are!"

"Dear me," answered Lady Lavinia, "I really was not thinking about it."

"And I," added Hollis, "was thinking of something to come until I forgot the present."

"Without bestowing a single reflection upon the past, I dare say," added Christabel.

"There is little in the past—at least of my life," replied Hollis, "but struggle and endurance; and they, I think, are best forgotten."

"Now that reminds me," observed the lady; "Mr. Hollis I am sure will not disoblige us, and I have long desired to know something more of him and his family. He is now sufficiently conscious of the interest we take in his success, not to be aware that no idle curiosity prompts the inquiry, while all are friends sufficient to take everything in good part. Mr. Hollis, will you so far oblige us as to sketch us a few of your struggles? It will amuse us, and, doubtless, instruct us also. You see we ourselves have nothing to say—the field is all your own—and you have a most delightful twilight to tell your story in. We shall scarcely be able to see each other before you have finished."

"I know not, ladies," said Hollis, "why a man should be afraid or ashamed to say his parentage was obscure; that he entered life through the wide gates of poverty, and has had to struggle into something higher than a bare animal existence, as though he were climbing the heights of a mountain from the confused heap of undistinguished fragments below:—

and yet such is the fact. It must arise from an acquired, not a natural feeling. But though I know this, it is with much diffidence that I tell all the truth—"

"Not knowing how it will be received?" laughingly demanded the lady. A pleasant reproach at which Hollis felt abashed.

"Depend upon it," added Miss Sylverthorne, "all that is unhappy in sorrow; the rest, I may venture to say, with gladness by both your auditors."

"Although, then," he continued, "my name appears to be, and, for any thing I know to the contrary, is Hollis, I am one of the numerous family of the Joneses—a descendant of that particular branch, the history of the life of a member of which, Mr. Tom Jones, Fielding has already written. In other words, ladies, I am a foundling."

"Then you never knew the love of a mother for you, or the struggles of a father?" asked the lady of Woodhouselee.

"Never, madam," answered Hollis, "but I well recollect a foolish and childish thought I had when I observed so many children like myself living in a great house with a school and a chapel in it, what a very large family my father and mother had, and how very rich, they must be to keep us all. I was then in the Foundling Hospital."

"What a pitiable and dreadful thing," exclaimed the lady, as she turned her eyes upon Miss Sylverthorne, "to fall upon the mercy of the world even for the first nourishment of life; to depend upon its charity, as it were, before one can so much as speak—when to cry is our only asking, and to smile our only thanks. Indeed, indeed I do pity any one who has had such a beginning as this."

Her companion made a bold effort to, express her assent to these sentiments in words, but something choked her, and she could not. The lady continued,—

"But what, at the same time, a beautiful illustration of human goodness and Christian feeling is that which practically declares, '*Take this child away and nurse it for me. Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.*' And further, and best of all, '*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.*' I need not tell either of you, I am sure, in what portions of Scripture these things are said. Some foolish, and, perhaps, hard-hearted people, have made certain objections to any institution like this under which Mr. Hollis was brought up;—and without which not only he, but thousands more must have gone lisping and babbling pretty nonsense to their little graves, or have lived perhaps to have only reached at last far worse, infinitely less innocent and holy. For myself, Christabel, I cannot believe it was ever meant in this sense,

that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children. So far from it, the criminality of the father only renders his innocents the more pitiable. If man destroy himself, the assured duty of society is at least to prevent him from destroying his children also. But pray, sir, what happened next?"

"At six or seven years of age," replied Hollis, "I was considered as naturally too weakly to undergo the usual exercises of the boys of that age, and which are intended as preparatory to their subsequent fitness for the pursuits of agriculture or of the sea; and consequently some license was in this respect extended to me as well as to others. On one occasion of leisure, I recollect so far outstepping regulations as to venture on mixing a quantity of the garden earth into a stiff paste, and trying to frame a model of the front of our house. It occupied a long time, and of course was rude enough; but when nearly finished, the boys discovered the secret, for a secret I had kept it, and after wondering awhile how I could have made it, were about to kick it down, when one of our superiors made his appearance, and prevented the threatened destruction. He commended the work highly, and expressed his regret that it was not executed in some material of a more endurable nature.

"After this I began to fancy myself capable of something more than my fellows, and having met with additional encouragement, should most probably have grown as vain as many others who have been ruined by self-conceit and the absurd flattery of ill-judging friends, had not a circumstance happened several years afterwards which lowered my dignity at once.

"A respectable house painter and decorator had applied at the institution for a suitable youth as an apprentice; and I was selected as the one most likely to meet his wishes. Arrangements were soon effected, and in the course of a short time I was removed to the house of Mr. Slab, in — street, Red Lion square. Never could change appear greater than did that to me. Places and people were alike different, and so different, that the space of two or three months scarcely sufficed to reconcile me to the alteration. All the little dreams of natural ambition that had previously haunted the mind, were temporarily put to flight on finding myself reduced as I thought to the drudgery of grinding colors, scraping palettes, rubbing about pumice stones, and cleaning Mr. Slab's fancy painting tools. To add to my grievances—for to me these duties were really such—Mr. Slab's house keeper, an old unmarried lady, named Bliss—Miss Bliss I was told to call her—not unfrequently used to send me to an inn hard by with a black bottle, on which was a large label marked 'Turpentine,' and which I naturally supposed to be for my

master's use; but she invariably on those occasions forewarned me that as the name was far too long for such a little boy as myself to remember, I was to be sure to ask instead for 'Gin,' which, she informed me, was a spirit not unlike the other, and, in fact, meant about the same thing. Certainly, however, the people would know when asked for it, as they had seen the bottle several times before. This little matter made me more ashamed and uncomfortable than any thing else, as the company standing about the counter to which I was sent, not unfrequently laughed at and made sport of the labelled bottle, as well as of myself; and eventually, at an early period, I rebelled, and resolutely refused to go on any future occasion.

"These are not reminiscences likely, I am afraid, at all to entertain you, ladies," here observed Mr. Hollis, "but as affording true though slight illustrations of human character, in both old and young, perhaps they may be excused. Of this I am certain from my own experience, that children frequently nounce much more than their elders give them credit for, and not uncommonly speak and act according to those dictates of undisguised nature which the latter have learned to disregard.

"Besides gaining during the period of my servitude, considerable knowledge of both ornamental and decorative painting, I also employed all my leisure in drawing and painting from such prints and designs as came into my hands, and as Mr. Slab was a man not altogether devoid of taste, he devoted a moderate collection to my service, stipulating at the same time to receive a copy or two now and then by way of consideration. This kind of practice improved me so much, that eventually all the portraits of His Majesty the King, of the Prince of Wales, and all such dukes and illustrious men as had entitled themselves to the distinguished elevation of an inn-keeper's sign, and for which Mr. Slab often obtained commissions, were committed entirely to my hands. The blue boars and red lead lions Mr. Slab undertook himself, upon the plea that being fancy animals, 'poetical fabulosities' he termed them, the more matured cultivation of his own imagination and his superior classical knowledge (founded entirely on the fact of his having half a volume of the *Metamorphoses* in his library) enabled him to give them that air and grace of life to which more illiterate and juvenile brushes could not aspire. But this I have reason to believe was only an ingenious subterfuge of his to hide his own lack of skill in the other department; since he always wished it to be distinctly understood, that there were few things indeed which he could not achieve, were he only to take it into his head to make the attempt. A test which, however easy it may appear, he always, save on one oc-

casion, magnanimously declined lest the result should prove the utter ruin of many other respected brethren of the craft, who at present did contrive to obtain a share of public patronage. The occasion which formed the exception to which I have alluded was this—

“One morning Mr. Slab found himself suddenly possessed with the most supreme contempt for his own vulgar art, and an equally irresistible resolution to become an artist in the truest sense of the word, commencing from that very hour. He informed me that there was nothing preposterous in the idea, as far as his years were concerned, because Pilkington’s dictionary contained various accounts of elderly gentlemen who had, as it were, gone back to the days of their youth, put themselves to school under themselves, and eventually proved as great as, if not greater than, many of those who had studied the arts throughout their whole lives.

“Accordingly he prepared a large sign-board for the maiden experiment, and upon it drew his first essay, in the shape of a portrait of Miss Bliss. I need not relate how highly flattered that lady felt herself on receiving this unexpected compliment from her employer.

“After more than a month’s hard sitting on her part, and deep application at all convenient times and seasons on the part of Mr. Slab, he one day hurled his pencils violently into the dust, skimmed his palette through the air and over the head of the affrighted Miss Bliss to the farther end of the room, and bouncing up in such a hurry as to upset both his stool and his easel, furiously declared, and called all the present generations of mankind to witness, that he never would be an artist as long as he lived, although he knew he had the talent in him for it; but from that hour he for ever renounced all connexion with any higher school of painting than that in which he had been brought up.

“When Miss Bliss now beheld the picture for the first time, she wept very bitterly to see such a deplorable representation of herself; and more especially so when in reply to her anxious and distressing inquiry—whether she was really like that? The cruel Slab assured her most positively that (excepting certain faults of execution) he would stake his life against a lump of yellow ochre that it was the very ‘counterfeit presentment’ of her—the two were as much alike as two broad beans.

“This disastrous attempt by the aspiring Slab, was subsequently turned over to me, out of which to manufacture a female sign; and, by the aid of such alterations as I made in it, the very same Miss Bliss now figures on the side of the north road out of London in the shape of ‘Mother Redcap.’

“Before my time of service had expired, I had no difficulty in discovering that amongst the vast body of consumers of oils and pigments,

the class to which Mr. Slab belonged was by no means the least successful in a worldly point of view. Since then I have seen many a worthy artist gaining scarcely more than the wages of an ordinary skilled laborer, when otherwise, had fate or fortune so ordered it, that he had been blessed with the far more popular if not superior genius of a Slab, he might quietly, and without anxiety, have enjoyed about him every comfort that a reasonable man, born in circumstances demanding personal exertions, could desire.

“Probably I should have continued in this situation in the capacity of journeyman after I had attained my majority, had not a terrible disaster occurred within a few weeks subsequent to the important day of my personal deliverance from servitude, which at once barred that path before me, and directed all my energies and prospects into another channel.

“Previously, however, allow me to state that towards the latter end of my service, Mr. Slab had become so perfectly satisfied with my exertions in the profitable if not glorious cause of sign painting, that at various times he had promised to leave me a small legacy in his will, in case I should survive him, and also the good will of his business to which I might succeed with most advantageous prospects, considering the exalted station to which he, my predecessor, had assuredly raised it. Yet, although I was in the constant habit of thanking Mr. Slab for this remarkable liberality with as much feeling as though the benefits implied by it were already felt and enjoyed, providence eventually decreed that both his benevolence and my gratitude should alike be rendered of no effect.

“Under the influence of another fit of ambition which impelled my employer to decorate the outside of his own house, instead of painting a second portrait of his housekeeper, Mr. Slab one day mounted a “horse” affixed outside his second story window, and sitting in imagined security across its back of plank, was revelling in the glories of white lead and lamp-black, when, by some dreadful mischance, the iron bolt which should have secured it on the inside of the wall suddenly gave way, and precipitated the unfortunate painter—not, correctly speaking, on to the pavement below, but upon the still more unfortunate Miss Bliss, his housekeeper, who, at the same point of time, chanced to be engaged in delivering a severe lecture to the servant-maid upon the art of properly cleaning the outsides of windows, immediately beneath the spot where Mr. Slab had been sitting. Miss Bliss was killed upon the spot, but in her death was the cause of the temporary preservation of her master’s life. He was carried into his own house, and attended upon surgically immediately.

“As soon as Mr. Slab was brought back to

his senses and the use of speech, he requested a messenger to be despatched to his nephew, Mr. Antonio Sebastian Slab, residing at Barnet, for the purpose of summoning that (his nearest) relative to what he anticipated to be his dying pillow. I was selected for the purpose, and for the greater speed a horse was fetched from a neighboring livery stable upon which to mount me. Never had I been in that elevated situation in my life before; and strongly protested that I would far prefer to walk; for although I knew there were such animals as horses in the natural world, yet not the most remote idea did I possess of the art of guiding one in a given track.

"'Speed, however,' said they, 'speed is every thing. These livery horses know the roads better than their riders, and want no guiding at all. Mount up and be off.'

"Saying which they helped me into the saddle, put the reins in one hand and a whip in the other, and having turned the horse's head in a direction as perfectly parallel with the first street down which I had to go, as though it had been regulated by the aid of a mariner's compass, the stable boy gave his steed a smart slap, and off he went at a pace which made me feel as though sitting upon a living earthquake. After many disasters on the road, I arrived at Barnet about midnight. The grand object of 'speed' having suffered a most entire discomfiture. By the aid of a watchman and a gas lamp I discovered, shining in golden letters on a blue ground, 'Slab, Painter and Glazier,' affixed over the door of a very low house, the chamber window of which was scarcely above my head as I sat on the back of my charger. Having knocked at both door and shutter, the occupier opened his casement slightly, and demanded who was there? adding that neither highwayman nor housebreakers had much of a chance in those regions, as he could pop his blunderbuss through as soon as look at me. Having satisfied him as to the purport of my errand, he replied,—

"'Oh! that's quite another thing,—that's news, that is.'

"As I most heartily desired once more to be placed upon the solid ground, I volunteered to transfer my horse to the younger Slab, and to await myself the passing of some night-coach, of which he informed me there were several yet due; and in the end I was conveyed in this way to London.

"On my arrival at home I found that my employer was rapidly approaching the moment of that last sigh, which gives back to the earth the air life it has received from it.

"Day was nearly breaking before I was asked to enter the room. But during the interval, Mr. Slab, the younger, several times came out and in to the one adjoining, in which I was

sitting, for the purpose, as he alleged, of taking a few pinches of snuff to sustain him through this bitter trial. Yet I observed that he did not wholly administer his dust to the usually accepted organ for its deposit, but contrived also, to insert a few grains into the corners of his eyes—a fact at which the censorious and evil-minded might sneer, though the more liberal and Christian will perhaps interpret it in another manner, when they reflect that grief is sometimes so excessive, that tears positively and flatly refuse to flow in spite of all the efforts of the mourner; and when, indeed, to shed them would be the greatest of all possible reliefs. In such cases it is assuredly the duty of man to assist the efforts and throes of nature as far as lies in his power; the more especially so when her demands, in a pecuniary point of view, amount to no more than the value of a pinch of snuff.

"When he made his will he was about to leave a legacy to Miss Bliss, but of course declined to proceed when informed that his housekeeper had gone to render in her account before him. At the same time, by an odd contrariety of memory, he totally forgot me, and left me neither the legacy he had so often promised, nor the good-will of that business which he was now declining for ever.

"At five in the morning Mr. Slab died, leaving all he possessed to his nephew Antonio. That young man at once proceeded to the landlord of his uncle's house—had it transferred to himself, and peremptorily informed me that as he wanted no journeymen about him at present, I might hold myself at liberty to leave as soon as I pleased, and the earlier the better. I made no reply, but immediately went out in search of lodgings; and within very few hours entered for the first time in my life upon a residence, such as it was, upon my own account.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. HOLLIS CONTINUES HIS STORY, AND MAKES
A PARTIAL DISCOVERY WHICH MATERIALLY AFFECTS
A CERTAIN HIGH LADY.

"MR. SLAB's liberality had not left me much with which to commence the world. And, under the circumstances in which I was then placed, ordinary prudence and foresight might have directed me at once to seek employment in the business to which I had been brought up. But, unfortunately, other thoughts and purposes entirely occupied my mind, and caused me to feel that neither present poverty,

nor struggle, nor misery, should prevent me from achieving a name which should not readily die out.

"With something less than five pounds in cash, I took one room in the cottage of a gardener, one Mr Qualmby, residing amidst the fields on the declivity of the hill behind Islington, fully determined to pursue my inclination for the arts in that place,—surrounded, as it appeared to me, by all the beauties of the natural world. From daylight until dark, I daily pursued my vocation; sparing but few minutes for meals, none for recreation, and living upon about three shillings per week.

"Yet, even with this economy, continual fears and apprehensions beset me as to the future. At night I laid down satisfied, and sometimes pleased with my day's labor; in the morning I awoke from wretched dreamings of my destitute condition, and filled with horrible forebodings of the fate that might await me when the last of my small fund was spent, and even the poor cottage I was then living in, refused longer to shelter me beneath its roof. Often were my studies pursued with a heavy heart, though hope never entirely deserted me, or refused to maintain me in my exertions. I knew that something must be done to find me a permanent subsistence, even after the present mode of life; but yet felt the utmost aversion to make any attempt towards the attainment of it, beyond what might so be considered in the studies of the profession which I had taken up. I had not courage to offer any of my pictures for sale, thinking that people would only laugh at me, and make sport of what I had done. My own fears produced abundant reasons for procrastination, and procrastination eventually brought about the very difficulties I had so much dreaded to encounter. In other words, the time at length arrived, when, out of the last five shillings I had left in the world, three-and-nine-pence was paid for my past week's rent."

"Oh, Mr. Hollis?" exclaimed the lady of Woodhouselee; "if I had but known your situation then!"

"It was a bitter school, madam," he replied; "but I learned many valuable lessons in it; tasks difficult enough to acquire, but of lasting good when once attained. But over these details I shall beg to pass altogether; merely remarking, that when necessity forced me upon what had previously appeared as insurmountable difficulties, I found them comparatively insignificant, and of little or no account.

"We scarcely ever can foretell, however, what good may come out of apparent present evil. It was by the merest accident that in consequence of my residence in this poor cottage, I chanced to hear a story which led me to believe I had ascertained something connected with my own history during the earliest

period of my childhood. The coincidence, if such it can be termed, may appear remarkable, but it is not more so than many others which are of almost daily occurrence.

"Mrs. Qualmby, the gardener's wife, was a sickly kind of woman, 'a very poor creature,' as she designated herself at least half-a-dozen times every day of her life. Cramps, spasms, rheumatism, and toothache, appeared to have taken up their special head-quarters with her; and hence she was the standing object of a vast deal of sympathy on the part of her neighbors, who never failed to pay her almost daily visits and condole with her on her manifold distresses. One old woman, Widow Smith, who occupied a very poor little cottage at the bottom of the garden, was a very constant visitor; as she appeared to have no other employment in the world but to wash up one cup and saucer twice a day, clean a plate as often, a dish about once a week, and wash her scanty wardrobe as occasion or necessity demanded. Mrs. Qualmby was very fond of old Mrs. Smith, because the latter was so very tender-hearted, and had more whites to her eyes than any other color. Yet Mrs. Smith generally begged a little bit of parsley before she went away, or a sprig of mint, or a carrot, or a turnip, or in short, anything that might happen to be convenient or in season. Such trifles, however, were nothing between friends, although they sufficed to keep Mrs. Smith in a reasonable supply of vegetables during the greater part of the year round.

"One evening in the winter time, I was sitting by the side of Qualmby's fire, my own room having no fire-place in it, when the Widow Smith called as usual, and having informed us how uncommonly cold it was, speculated upon the great probability of a frost (a thing not unlikely, considering the thermometer then stood six degrees below freezing point), and having taken her seat on the top of one of Qualmby's market-hampers, entered with her hostess upon the old subject of conversation, which eventually led to a kind of friendly contention, an amicable dispute, as to which of the pair had suffered the greatest amount of pain, or had the worst illnesses during the course of their lives. Each most sympathetically allowed that the other had endured amazing torments, but still insisted in a kind of self-consolatory manner that no poor soul in the world *could* have gone through what she had except herself. In illustration of her own peculiar 'lion's share' of the sorrows of humanity, the Widow Smith related the following story, which, as I thought, let me into the early history of my own life:—

"'Me and Mr. S,' she said, 'set off in life with the charmingest prospects before us as any young couple that ever was ringed. He had a good business and very bootiful whis-

kers, and I was then considered unwarrantably handsome, and as industrious a housekeeper as any in the street,—ay, and a good deal more than that. We was groshers and general dealers—hams, pipes, treacle, and all them sort of things—and started in buzness at Whetstone, where my poor dear S. was naterally born. At first we went on very well, the counter was always alive, and my husband turned over a mortal sum of money every week. But unfortunately, Mrs. Qualmby, men generally likes speckylating. If they save a trifle, there it goes in trade again. They never know when to be satisfied. My S. was one of that sort—though I told him there was often more money picked out of the mud than atop of the highest ground. He despised my advice, and fell into difficulties. But his old father, who had scraped a little during his time, tried to keep up his credit by lending him floating capital, until he could lend no more; and after that they was both what they call declared insolvent together. This was only the very day before my time was up. The next morning I went to bed, crying more like a watering-pan than any thin' else; and presented my happy husband with a very fine darter. To be sure, another time might have been better, but them things, you know, Mrs. Qualmby, can't be helped. We must take them when it pleases the Lord to be so good as send 'em. However, at the end of a fortnight, when we was completely broke up, and had no consolation left but that precious babby, it pleased the Lord to take her back again; and there was I left as fine a mother as ever nurse could wish to see, wi'out anythin' in my arms.

“It took half of what poor S. had allowed him by the creditors to bury her respectfully; and when I got well enough to walk a few miles, which was not very long after, he determined, as he said, not to be grinded any more on that horrid Whetstone, but to go to London and try his luck as a shopman.

“Well, we set out one day in the month of October to walk,—yes, that we did, in order to save a penny,—to walk to the great metropolis. It was a fine day, but as dark came on it began to rain. We did not want to spend at public-houses, nor, with what little we had, to pay for lodgings that night if we could help it.

“So at last, as the rain got thicker and thicker, we resolved to get into the first comfortable shelter. It was not far off London, when we seed some workmen having a lot of carcasses built nigh a gentleman's house; though exactly where I could never after exactly find out. When we got to them, poor S. slipped down a airy to look about him. In a bit he called me to come down, which I did; and there we made a very comfortable bed of a lot of shavings and stuff; and most likely, being so tired, we should have slept till morning,

hadn't my husband waked me some time in the night and whispered to me to lie still, because he thought there was somebody a coming down th' airy. There was a trial, Mrs. Qualmby! My heart was in my mouth, and every limb of me trembled as if it would shake the whole carcass over our heads. In a bit we heard a rustling of feet on the floor, and after that fancied we could discern somebody scrambling back again up the slant. S. was a man of tremenjuss currige, so he gets up, walks as quietly as he could after them as what had gone out, and see what and who they was. In two or three minutes I hears a struggle, which made me rare myself straight up the empty chimley and skreek in the flue to hinder my voice from being heard. There was *another* trial, Mrs. Qualmby,—think of that!

“He poked his way back again, and told me it was a woman,—a lady, he thought, because when he tried to seize hold on her she felt to have a velvet pelisse on. However, he tore off her pinned neck front, but she got away.

“Just as our eyelids was a dropping the second time, we heard a little babby cry in the place as plain as ears could tell us. S. jumps up, feels carefully about—you see what tremenjuss currige he had—and soon claps his hands on a bundle. That bundle cries again—so he gives it to me, and says, says he, ‘Missis,’ says he, ‘you’ve lost your own, but here’s another for you, if you like it, though I advise you to leave it where it is, and let them as left it get it again if ‘they think proper.’ ‘Nay, nay,’ says I, ‘that they’ll never do. I’ll keep it instead of my own. So I nursed it all night, and next morning found it was a lad dressed in rare fine clothes, and must be somebody, though he could not tell us, poor thing, who or what.

“When daylight pep’ down the airy, we looked about for anything else, but had not half done before we fancied we heard men’s tongues, and in a great fright scrambled out, and made the best of our way to London. S. got to be porter in a grosher’s in Olborn, and we took a part of a small house—in fact, it was a natic—not far off. I nursed the child till I thought he must be seven or eight months old, and then we took him to the Foundling Hospital. Both of us proved how we had come by him; told them who we was—two of the S.s of Whetstone and made it very plain that we could not afford to keep him. Howsomdever, I used to inquire after him, and larned that at last they had put him out to a painter, and called his name Ollis, the same as this young man’s as lodges with you.’

“Well, that is wonderful!” exclaimed Mrs. Qualmby; ‘perhaps you are the same, sir. Do you remember ever being took to the Foundlin’, Mr. Ollis?’

"Not in the least, ma'am," I answered, and truly too.

"And have you never been there?"

"A great many times," I replied, "within the last few years; most usually to the chapel on Sundays."

"Hence, they both concluded that the coincidence was in name and trade only; and more than that I did not wish them to know. But from this slight and rude low-life sketch," added the young artist, "you will readily perceive, ladies, that in all probability the account did refer to myself."

Notwithstanding the, to some minds, coarse, though characteristic nature of some portions of this relation, one, the highest of his two auditors, seemed to have become almost spell-bound as soon as Widow Smith's story was commenced. When it was concluded, the Lady of Woodhouselee rather tremulously demanded,

"You have named the month, Mr. Hollis, in which this boy was stated to be found; did you also hear the particular year?"

"I regret, my lady, he replied, "that I should have made the omission, but the discovery was in October of the year 18—"

The lady uttered a faint cry, and sank in her chair insensible. Assistance was called, and Mr. Hollis retired.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH THINGS OF SO UNACCOUNTABLE A NATURE ARE RELATED, THAT MR. HOLLIS BECOMES COMPLETELY BEWILDERED.

"My dear Christabel," said the lady, as soon as sufficiently recovered, "in what a dreadful position am I placed! I feel as though the curtain of darkness which I have long thought would hang before the scenes of my whole life, now began to exhibit light beyond its edges, and to cheer me with the hope that soon—oh, may it be very soon!—the whole shall be withdrawn, and let in the vision of happiness and glory upon me once more, before I am myself called to perform, I hope, a higher part beyond that deep and awful darkness which never rises to the people of this world! You, equally with me, have heard this young man's story; but, to my mind, it tells far more than it can to yours. Events happened several years before you were born, and most deeply concerning myself, of which you know nothing."

And here the lady paused, as though a flood of past recollections had swept away all present thought, and engulfed her in its shadowed depths. When she resumed it was to add what follows:

"You are a beautiful and noble creature, Christabel—one that man, with all his sins and crimes, ought scarcely to dare a dream of. But place your hand upon my forehead, and I will tell you all."

And so Christabel did that moment. Nay, she did more than she was asked, she let fall hot tears upon her friend's hands, and then tried to wipe them away again. But the lady forbade her. "Such drops," she said, "fall not often, and most seldom when most required. Nobody has wept so over me since the month and year mentioned by Mr. Hollis, and then I believe my sister did, at least, she seemed to do, and that, except my own grief, was all I knew. I had a boy then, but they said he died: and that little angel rising from the draperies drawn around a bed of sickness in Mr. Hollis's picture means my poor dead glory—my heart, my soul, my all but life, for I have lived until now since then. Oh, shame on my heart that it did not break—that it should have felt one momentary pleasure between that hour and this!"

Miss Sylverthorne begged her for the present to desist—to relate the remaining portion another time, when her mind and feelings were more at rest.

"Excuse me," answered the lady, "I have but few more words to say, and will speak them now. I am afraid a foolish thought has come into my head; I hope I am not going insane, let us pray not of all things; yet I will tell you that when the story was ended I thought I saw my own child. But I will find it all out. I will make quite sure. I begin to believe I shall have the terrible duty put upon me of discovering the utter disgrace of a sister and her husband—the Thorotons I mean. Should it be so, I pray that heaven may grant me power to do at least justice to myself and my child, if I weakly do nothing more than shew mercy to them."

"And now Christabel, allow me to tell you (and be you certain to remember), that I must not see Mr. Hollis again until something more has been discovered. I could not endure another meeting under my present thoughts: I cannot even write to him to say that for the present he is banished from this house. That task I must depute to you."

At which Miss Sylverthorne blushed, and then begged to be excused.

"You will not refuse me, nevertheless," resumed the lady, "and all the rest of the business shall be left in the hands of my solicitor."

And so most surely it was; for on the following forenoon Mr. Sandhill the solicitor called upon the Lady of Woodhouselee, and after being closeted with her an hour and a half or more, took his departure again, conscious that another large item was about to be added to the amount of his yearly income.

Much about the same time our young artist received a note from Miss Sylverthorne, intimating the desire expressed by his patroness on the preceding evening, that for the present at least his visits might with propriety be spared; but adding that the writer herself intended very soon to return home to Ashby de la Zouch where her mother resided.

"What an unfortunate fellow am I," thought Hollis, as with a trembling hand he repeatedly perused the writing before him. "What have I done? What unknown offence given? What mistake made? My visits may be spared for the present! That means wholly and for ever, of course. And so I have lost the only worthy patron I ever had; scarcely sooner found than lost again. And Christabel is returning home without even intimating the least regret at leaving town, or so much as hinting that it would give her the most remote sensation of pleasure to see me again! I suppose my story has given to both so contemptuous an idea of me from my miserable origin and most wretched after-struggles, that I am no longer considered worthy of regard. Well, be it so, and if so, I care not, not I. The world shall yet see that though a man who can call no one father, claim no noble beauty for my mother, nor even say that I have one sole relation under Heaven, that I stand alone, unhelped and uncounselled, yet I am not a man to be despised!"

Upon the mental utterance of which heroic sentiment Mr. Hollis folded his arms and marched about his room.

Before he could persuade himself to set down again, another letter arrived. It bore a seal of important appearance, and was by no means contemptible in point of size of folding.

It was from Mr. Sandhill, requesting an interview with the individual to whom it was addressed, at his earliest convenience, any morning between ten and twelve. A draft for fifty pounds from the Lady Lavinia was also enclosed, together with an intimation from the solicitor that the same amount from the same source would be transmitted to him every month from that date.

Men of the temperament, mental and bodily, which Hollis possessed, are ever strange, wayward beings. Everything out of their most ordinary every day tract is controlled by impulses merely. Like springs that ebb and flow—now lying silent within themselves, then rushing out with a degree of impetuosity, which seems to say they can never be exhausted; such spirits appear to the ordinary world almost inexplicable; beings of two principles only—love and madness. Love and madness associated, though not combined by any of those intermediate strata of feeling which in others serve to assimilate extremes, and to fit man all the better for intercourse with his common brother. Pure darkness and pure light, pure

good and pure evil, these are the only strong characteristics observable in them. They travel far on each side, but seem to know no middle course.

Hence our artist no sooner found that he had done a grievous wrong to the lady his patroness, than he actually fell on his knees, and asked pardon of Heaven for having so hastily thought evil of a fellow-creature. He blessed his benefactress a hundred times and prayed that he might yet live to be personally restored to her favor, and prove himself at least one source of her future happiness.

As these feelings subsided, he began to reflect more calmly upon the question, what can all this mean? Discarded, and yet so profusely supported by the same hand?

No reasoning availed him; nor could he arrive at any other conclusion than this, that having now so much within his power, he would avail himself of it to the very utmost in the pursuit of his glorious profession, and leave all the rest for time and future events to discover.

Next morning he waited upon Mr. Sandhill, and from that learned gentleman received instruction to find out the Widow Smith again at his earliest convenience, and obtain from her whatever further information, if any, she might be able to give him.

Hollis replied that a very considerable time had elapsed since he left Qualmby's cottage, and it was most uncertain whether the widow still remained in the neighborhood, or, indeed, whether she was even alive; but added that he would do his best, and communicate the results as early as possible.

Fancying, from this conversation with the solicitor, that there was something more in the present proceedings than could then be fathomed, and feeling deeply anxious to know what would be their ultimate result, he expedited his part of the business as far as in him lay, by proceeding directly towards Islington.

Arriving there just before noon, the cottager's dinner time, he had "the inexpressible happiness" of not only finding Widow Smith alive, but also of detecting her in the very act of begging a small cabbage—the smaller the better—from her old horticultural friend, Mrs. Qualmby. But in this pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, we must for the present leave him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

INTRODUCES MR. SANDHILL, THE LAWYER, TO THE READER—HIS INTERVIEW WITH MR. THOROTON, AND SUBSEQUENT RESEARCHES.

AN able and faithful lawyer may honestly be ranked amongst the most valuable of human

beings. Next to the physician, he is the refuge and comforter of the suffering—the active living agent of human justice in a world of cruelty, oppression, and wrong. Amongst the low or the high, the small or the great, he is still the same. He has an ear for the petition of the helpless poor, as well as a purse for the fee of the able and wealthy. Such a man—rare as the specimen is—was Mr. Sandhill. And about the business in hand he set himself as follows.

First, he took a favorable opportunity of waiting upon Dr. Carious, the gentleman who had attended upon Lady Lavinia during her accouchement; and by a series of indirect but artful questions gradually drew that learned gentleman into conversation respecting the object of his visit. During this interview Mr. Sandhill induced the doctor very unsuspectingly to produce his diary for the year 18—, in which was contained an entry of the important fact of his client's having become the mother of a boy in October of that year.

"You will much oblige me doctor," said Mr. Sandhill, "by a duplicate of that entry, signed by yourself as principal attendant physician. The Lady of Woodhouselee has placed her affairs wholly in my hands; and I have her ladyship's commands to make whatever inquiries I, as her legal adviser, may deem proper, with a view to their final settlement, and the making of her last will and testament."

"But, my good sir," interrupted Carious, "the child—"

"I am quite aware of it, doctor, quite. The child died, or was born dead: that makes no difference whatever. The fact must be legally ascertained and assured, in order that Mrs. Thoroton, the next heiress, may obtain such an indisputable title as shall prevent future litigation on the part of any pretender who else might arise, in the name of that dead son, to dispute it."

The doctor was no lawyer; and, from these observations, fancying his wicked coadjutors in the business were sure of their prize without discovery, and himself of his long-delayed reward, readily gave the copy desired.

"And now, doctor, can you inform me where the remains were deposited?—That is another fact necessary to be ascertained; for assuredly they were not carried away by an undertaker, and put into the ground like those of a dog?"

"Of that, my dear sir," answered Carious, "I know nothing. We may reasonably presume the corpse was conveyed to the family vault; but, of course, the lady's relatives, the Thorotons, superintended all necessary arrangements of that kind, and doubtless, most strictly and religiously observed everything that was right to be done."

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless; not the least doubt about it!" echoed Mr. Sandhill, "but it

will be needful for me to see the Thorotons upon the subject, in order to secure as far as possible that branch of the family in the legitimate possession of what otherwise might prove disputed estates. You will have no objection, doctor, to accompany me at your earliest convenience?"

Dr. Carious did not exactly relish the proposition, but he scarcely knew how to avoid it; and consequently it was eventually agreed that they should again meet that day week for the especial purpose of proceeding to the residence of Mr. Thoroton.

The time arrived, and the meeting took place.

Very much to Mr. Sandhill's surprise, considering Mr. Thoroton's family and presumed station in society, he found that gentleman living (so far as outward appearances were to be trusted) in a manner which betrayed either great deficiency of becoming pride, or great lack of means by which to display it. That the former was not the case, the reader can readily believe; that the latter *was* he will know to be equally certain.

When our solicitor introduced the business upon which he had undertaken the present visit, he did so with such an admirably assumed air of entire confidence,—free from all appearance of suspicion—in the integrity and uprightness of his auditor, Mr. Thoroton, and evinced so much apparent solicitude to settle matters for his welfare in the best and most secure manner possible, that this gentleman was thrown completely off his guard. Yet while Mr. Sandhill did all this, he did not forget likewise to mark every expression of Mr. Thoroton's countenance, every change of feeling which their discourse elicited, every, the slightest, evidence—whenever it could be discovered—of misgiving when he fancied either a truth was disguised, or perhaps a direct untruth uttered.

On the part of Mr. Thoroton, many needful details were given with the utmost appearance of frankness and candor; though the keen perception of Mr. Sandhill enabled him to discover through all this disguise, the deep considerations of studied dissimulation, and the cautious endeavors to avoid involving himself in contradictions which the speaker strove vainly to hide.

While the conversation was yet proceeding, and at a point of time when the solicitor began to think he should fail in his endeavors to elicit all that he wished to know, a servant announced to Mr. Thoroton the arrival of a gentleman who wished to see him immediately upon business of the most urgent importance.

Mr. Thoroton directed that he should be shown into another room, and shortly afterwards left Mr. Sandhill and the doctor to commune together during a brief period, while he

held an interview with the stranger. That stranger, good reader, was no other than Mr. Thoroton's old pest, his living plague, Saul, the astrologer.

"Your most humble servant," said Saul, "and likewise," he mentally added, "your complete master."

"I can do no more," was the reply, if it could be called one, made by Mr. Thoroton. "Beggared as I am by you, and should have been had my possessions been ten times greater, you must know that the longest thread has an end, and to that end I have now come. Your extortion can go no farther. Rest content, man, with what you have already obtained, let your avarice now sleep on the meal it has made, and your own rascality."

"Tush, tush!" ejaculated Saul, "hard words are mischievous: and it is by no means your interest, Mr. Thoroton, to make mischief between yourself and me. Besides, I am one of those men whose temper it is never to forgive or forget an injury. On my very death-bed I would avenge it with my right arm, if I could—if not I would curse the doer with the last breath that left my body. In my mind, what you have already offended in against me rises up like a mountain of which I shall never lose sight during the whole journey of my life. The heap is great already—be wise and cautious enough not to add to it."

"More is not in my power at present," rejoined Thoroton; "not an atom more. It may be at some future time, but when, I know not. If that will content you, very good; if not, I am totally reckless of consequences, and you must do as you like; take what course you will, and I shall be prepared to abide the event."

"Enough!" exclaimed Saul; "our books are now closed upon the past, and from this hour I open a new account."

So saying, Saul quitted the house, with a firm resolve to bring, ere a very long time was over, the wretched course of his dupe to a conclusion.

Mr. Thoroton followed him into the garden, and angry recrimination still continued between the two. As they passed the window of the apartment in which Mr. Sandhill and the doctor were awaiting the return of their host, that remarkable looking stranger, Saul, was distinctly heard to exclaim to Mr. Thoroton:—

"Remember the Adelphi vaults! Thou wouldst have committed murder then, but for the power of my art. Remember, that the boy was stolen again that night by thee. What is it to be believed then followed, but murder inevitable? And now, having ceased to do, thy time has come to begin to suffer."

Mr. Sandhill most emphatically noted these truly, to him, remarkable words; though

without expressing the least outward sign that they had attracted his attention in the most remote degree. He could scarcely fail, however, to observe, that no sooner were they uttered, than Dr. Carious evinced considerable discomposure of mind, and became unusually pale.

Some time elapsed before Mr. Thoroton again returned to his visitors; the perturbation of his mind having been so great from this unpleasant incident, happening, too, at such a particular juncture, that for the time being, he felt totally unfitted to resume a conversation too closely touching the very subject which had caused his disquietude.

Anxiously and hurriedly he traversed the most remote walks of the garden, striving to sum up what courage was yet left him; to reassure himself, and to gather sufficient bold determination to enable him to carry out this last final stroke of a long and painful course of policy, with effect and triumph.

When Mr. Thoroton reappeared before his visitors, Mr. Sandhill resumed the conversation, much as follows:—

"Her ladyship, Mr. Thoroton, has always understood that the remains of her son were deposited in the family-vault at Woodhouse-lee?"

"Oh, certainly,—beyond all doubt!" exclaimed Thoroton; "the velvet of Sir Stephen's coffin was scarcely tarnished by the damp, when the body of his son was laid beside him."

"You attended the ceremony yourself, of course?"

"I did; and saw that all arrangements were properly disposed."

"Properly disposed?"

"Yes, sir—yes. Why lay emphasis on the word, sir?" asked Mr. Thoroton; "is it at all doubtful——?"

"Not in the least, my good friend," interrupted the wily Mr. Sandhill; "pray understand me properly. I marked the word, perhaps unconsciously, because I felt so strongly, sir, that, as the husband of that lady's sister, as the uncle of that baby, and as a strictly upright, undesigning, and honorable man, it is morally impossible, Mr. Thoroton, that you could have acted otherwise."

And as the solicitor uttered the latter half of this sentence, his eyes were steadily fixed upon the countenance of the individual he addressed; his voice was so singularly modulated that its sounds carried more meaning than his words; and no man, save one who was perfectly innocent, could have failed to feel that he spoke with the intensest bitterness of irony.

"No, sir," continued Mr. Sandhill; "the most common feelings of humanity demanded, at that sorrowful hour, from both yourself and your excellent lady, attentions too kind and

delicate to be expressed in language; tenderness such as angels might shed invisibly and silently upon the heart of racked and suffering woman,—of woman untimely widowed, and in weeds and sorrow brought newly down to the pillow of the mother. These, sir, the rudest heart must have made some attempts to pay; but how well they were carried out by you and your wife, your own heart alone, Mr. Thoroton, can be the true judge."

The self-convicted individual thus addressed literally trembled beyond the possibility of entire concealment; his countenance wore an indescribable expression of mingled fear and amazement, and his eyes seemed vainly to seek the spot upon which they might rest for more than a few moments' space together. Dr. Carious appeared as though very strongly under the influence of one of his own opiates, while the powerful contrast produced by these two guilty faces, only made that of the honest lawyer more radiant and beautiful in its expression of high integrity and warm benevolence. But he now ceased to speak further—his point was gained. By a well-applied rule of rhetoric, he had convinced himself, to a moral certainty, of the existence of that secret guilt which else no mere examination could have elicited at all. It only remained now to render the legal certainty equally demonstrable and clear.

He took his leave with so much apparent sincerity of feeling and unaffected politeness, that Mr. Thoroton was again completely deceived, and, as it were, persuaded that the interpretation which he had put upon Mr. Sandhill's discourse, was entirely the result of his own fears, and by no means prompted by any real knowledge which that gentleman possessed of the literal facts of the case.

With that readiness and promptitude of action which distinguished Mr. Sandhill's character, he suffered no long period to elapse before he went privately down to Woodhouselee, for the purpose of having the great vault of the family opened, and thus satisfying himself of the truth or falsity of Mr. Thoroton's statement, respecting the burial of the Lady Lavinia's first-born.

To his surprise, it must be confessed, he found the coffin exactly as had been described by Mr. Thoroton; for, in reality, Mr. Sandhill's firm conviction had been that the whole story was a fabrication, and would have been triumphantly proved so by the result of the present examination. There were a silver plate upon the lid, with a suitable inscription, and sufficient remains yet undestroyed inside, to satisfy the examiner that a newly-born infant had in reality been entombed. A distinct record was also found of the funeral, and the old sexton himself still retained a perfect recollection of that circumstance.

These indisputable facts somewhat staggered

the lawyer's faith in the singular stories he had heard, and detracted from the probability of the conjectures and suppositions which had been founded upon them. "And yet," he thought, "it is not impossible that a supposititious body may have been substituted the better to complete the deception, if it really be one; and who so likely to procure it for the occasion as Doctor Carious himself? It must be so, and this is the simple solution of the seeming mystery. But what evidence have we? how can we prove it? True, true; it is easy to presume as much as this, but the proof of it is quite another matter. And yet," pursued Mr. Sandhill, mentally, as he leaned back upon his chair in an attitude of deep meditation, "the other matters concerning Hollis may be mere coincidences. What, though he was born about the same time, there is nothing surprising in that, for many others besides must also have been similarly born. Neither is it remarkable that he should have been exposed in the same month of October in the same year. Foundlings and outcasts are too numerous to render such a circumstance at all remarkable. The only wonder in the affair is, that a child so abandoned, and at such an age, should ever have survived its sufferings. But again, it must be asked, what meant that eccentric-looking stranger the other day, with his 'Remember the Adelphi vaults!' his allusions to an attempted murder, and his avowed belief that murder was by Mr. Thoroton subsequently committed? That man must be sought out and sifted; he might allude in those words to this identical business. If I can lure him to my house and by promises or threats obtain any information privately, so much the better; it will prevent public exposure, and best please the Lady of Woodhouselee. If not, he shall be arrested and examined by the magistracy. At all events and hazards, the inquiry must and shall be pursued to its legitimate conclusion!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DISCLOSES SOMETHING MORE, AND SHOWS HOW BENEVOLENTLY MR. SANDHILL STROVE TO DAMP THE SPIRITS OF THE YOUNG ARTIST.

WHEN Mr. Sandhill again met Mr. Hollis, in a comfortable apartment in the town residence of the former gentleman, it was for the purpose of receiving from the young artist an account of such further discoveries, if any, as he might have been enabled to make through the obscure medium of Widow Smith's recollections.

"Well, sir, and what further news?" demanded the attorney, as he motioned Hollis to a seat, and took one himself, "have you advanced the inquiry in any material respect?"

"In nothing, I fear, of great importance," replied the painter, "for it is difficult to make such people comprehend what is and what is not worthy of relation; and even at last the only matters of any value escape by accident, and without being estimated as such by the parties themselves. At first the widow appeared to have forgotten a great deal; but when I had brightened her recollections with a trifling present, and also alluded to the probability of something being done in future to make her old age comfortable, in case she proved to be the charitable nurse of my own babyhood, the light of the past began to break out more boldly; and she favored me with a two hours' history of that charitable action to which, I suppose, I owe my existence. In all this, however, there was nothing new, or deserving of notice. But with respect to the clothing which the foundling had on, she communicated something that may prove, sir, more to the point. In her eyes every article appeared to be of the very finest texture and workmanship, and rather designed for a "young prince," as she expressed it, than for a child so abandoned and so found. On one of the outer garments she said there was curiously worked in golden thread the figure of a man's hand open—"

"It is enough!" exclaimed Mr. Sandhill, with emotion, "that hand is the crest of the benevolent family of Woodhouselee!"

The whole truth—if truth it could be—then for the first time rushed upon the mind of Mr. Hollis, and seemed to overwhelm him with a stupor that left no power of expression but in tears. In the open-hearted, the thoughtful, and beautiful Lady Lavinia, he now saw his own mother; in himself a son long lost, and unceasingly deplored.

"Proceed," said Mr. Sandhill, rather for the purpose of breaking the spell which this momentary scene had cast upon both, than from any other motive.

"Below it," continued Hollis, with an effort, was also worked the letter W."

"Presumptive evidence of the most valuable kind," exclaimed Mr. Sandhill. "Let us hope these articles are still in existence. Surely the old woman has not parted with them?"

"They have been pledged at the shops more than half-a-dozen times," replied Hollis, "during periods of privation and distress. But as the old lady appears always to have retained some pride in them (for they seemed to say to her that her adopted baby was no beggar's child), and to have also cherished a superstitious notion that one day or other they might bring the obscure to light, and the disowned to

the possession of his own, she always contrived to redeem the garments before the expiration of their time. She has them in her possession now. But with the usual tenacity of age, strengthened, perhaps, by a secret suspicion that they have become of extraordinary value, she resolutely refused to allow them to pass out of her own possession at any price."

"Very characteristic of ignorance and declining years," said Mr. Sandhill, smiling; "but no matter so long as they are safe, and safe they needs must be in such jealous keeping."

"I had two separate interviews with her," continued our young artist, "in order to allow her an opportunity, between them, to inspect that portion of the suburbs where the incident of this finding happened. On a former occasion she had declared her inability to discover the place again; but, whether she exercised greater diligence on the present occasion, or whether a zealous imagination aided her in the identification of the neighborhood, it is not for me to determine. But oddly enough, as you will think, she declares emphatically that it was close upon a house which, from her description, I find to have been formerly (perhaps at that identical period) in the occupation of Mr. Thoroton."

"Singular enough, most truly!" observed the attorney, "but another strong link in the chain of accumulating evidence. For, inasmuch as this poor woman herself must be totally ignorant of that connexion which we imagine we see in these things, it is but barely possible she can be mistaken. Associations of this nature are too close to be regarded as mere coincidences,—the result of chance or accident,—they are worthy evidence, Mr. Hollis, for the consideration of a jury."

After a pause, Mr. Sandhill added,—"Had the old lady anything further to communicate?"

"Nothing," replied Hollis; "these slight points constitute the sum of our information in that quarter."

"In that case, then," rejoined the attorney, "and as we have half an hour's leisure, let us extend the conversation a little. Without making, just now, a *confidante* of you, I will briefly inform you of what you must necessarily be curious to know. It is proper, too, that you should know it, in order, at least, to be prepared for that possible reverse of fortune, and downfall of your probable castles in the air, which I foresee may soon take place. Do not misconceive me. I am only anxious that amidst these, to you, mysterious proceedings, you should not fashion dreams that may never be realized, or run the risk of falling so deeply from the height of an imaginary tower, as to feel yourself lower than when the first foundation-stone of it was laid. Disappoint-

ment, my young friend, leaves the heart more extinguished than is the heart that never hoped at all."

Mr. Sandhill again hesitated; but in the course of a few minutes resumed his discourse—

"A series of circumstances, which may almost be regarded as providential, has eventually led your liberal patron, the Lady of Woodhouselee, to entertain the somewhat wild and romantic opinion, that you may be her own child; an opinion none the less romantic for the apparent support which it derives from the facts that have recently transpired. It is true that the periods of her own loss and of your desertion, agree sufficiently near to give some coloring to the assumptions which have been founded upon them: it is equally true that every child born at the same time—and there must have been many—might, if abandoned by its yet more abandoned parents, put forward a not dissimilar claim. The justice of that claim can be ascertained only by tracing through a chain of evidence sufficiently unbroken to connect the two extremes together. Whether this can ever be effected in the present instance, remains to be seen; but it is the part of prudence to withhold very flattering hopes, and of humility to moderate the eagerness of anticipation. In the course of my professional life, I have so frequently seen a most formidable array of almost irresistible circumstantial evidence, suddenly and entirely negated by a very simple but unexpected fact, that it would ill become me, in my present character, were I to refrain from thus warning you, for your own sake, against the youthful error of building your happiness upon dreams, or relying upon a fortunate turn being given to the events which have so recently transpired. Every investigation that discretion can suggest, will be made; but, pending their result, maintain that equanimity of mind, and that sobriety of feeling, which is best adapted to enable you to encounter whatever extreme of pleasure or disappointment may eventually terminate this inquiry."

Mr. Hollis had never before, throughout his life, heard one human tongue speak to him so parentally. Its calm and sedate tones went to his heart; he felt suddenly to have become as a child that hears the advising accents of a father; and, as the tears almost started in his eyes, he could but faintly acknowledge his gratitude, while he added, also, that the frequency of his disappointments, during the struggles of his earlier years, had rendered him for ever incapable of either soaring very high in hope, or sinking deeply in despair.

"That path is now mine," he said, "which all men tread who have had the misfortune to be made half stoics by necessity."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SHOWS HOW DOCTOR CARIOUS AND MRS. THOROTON TOOK THE ALARM, WHILE MR. THOROTON REMAINED STEADFAST AND THREATENED VENGEANCE.

THE determined threats of discovery, of which, as we have seen, Saul made use towards Mr. Thoroton at their last interview, left him, it may readily be conceived, in a state of feeling of no very enviable description. At the very time when otherwise he fancied the great object at which he aimed almost within his grasp—(for his belief was fixed that Lady Lavinia now intended to arrange her affairs, and that Woodhouselee must descend to her sister, Clarice, his wife)—to have it thus dashed away before him, by the identical villain to whom he had already sacrificed so much! The thought was more than he could endure: and he resolved, in the heat of the moment, either to compel his continued silence, or, that failing, that his own fall should be the signal for the final ruin of Saul also. But before setting about the execution of his contemplated plans, he communicated the results of the last interview to his wife.

"Have you consulted with Dr. Carious in this emergency?" she anxiously inquired.

"I have," replied Thoroton, "and found a terrified coward, where might have been expected a resolute and determined man. The simple suspicion of any possible discovery affects him so much, that, if not betrayed by others, he will inevitably betray himself. The sooner such a man is put out of the way the better: he cannot be of any use, but he may be productive of much mischief. I foresaw this in a moment, and as instantly resolved to get him out of the way."

"Oh, for mercy's sake let us have no more —"

"Pooh, pooh, woman!" sternly said Mr. Thoroton, interrupting the lady; "a fly may be blown away as well as killed. I began to work upon his fears immediately, and to heighten his already exaggerated terrors. I painted to him his utter downfall in society, and his victimization by the offended laws of his country. I proved to him—no difficult matter with a coward—that his destruction was inevitable at every point save one. I exhorted him instantly to seek his safety in flight; and while yet suspicion was but in the bud, to take refuge in that common asylum for foreign crime as well as misery and misfortune—America. He eagerly swallowed my advice; and by this time, thanks to my ingenuity! is, probably, ready for his departure."

"Would that I could but prevail upon you to go too!" exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton earnestly; "no good to us can ever come of this, for the design is plainly beginning to be discovered

even now. In a short period—no one knows how short—we may find it impossible to go, however willing to do so. How shall we then wish we had seized the opportunity while we had it, and repent, too late, our present folly?"

"Whatever you may do, madam," said Mr. Thoroton, "I shall repent of nothing in this world, come what will. There is time enough in eternity for the indulgence of that weakness, if all they tell us be true. I go to America? I run away from the pelting, if it must be so, of a storm of my own raising? No, woman, not I. Many years, Clarice, as you have known your husband, you are unacquainted with him even yet!"

"They have got hold of something," pursued Mrs. Thoroton, "by some means or other, *that* is evident. What it is, or by what means come at, makes no matter. The end of the thread once in hand, the whole skein is soon unravelled. Besides, even if their search should fail, how are you to escape that horrible Saul?"

"Ask yourself, rather," retorted Thoroton, "how Saul shall escape me? What! think you, am I such a mouse to be played with by such a cat, and then to be devoured at last?" And the speaker laughed with fearful scorn, as he added, "many an eagle stoops to pick up an adder that stings him to death at last. The fight is on the side of him who attacks, but the victory may be with him who is molested."

"I hope it may be so on this occasion," said the lady, "but you have a fearful and a cunning man to deal with. Remember he has outwitted you so far—"

"He has, has he? Look at me good lady, look at me! Do you now think that I am the man to be over-reached by such a juggling impostor, such a fool of charms and incantations as this Saul? I will blast him like a mildew wheat!—eat into his heart like rust. And as easily as I have sent one fool upon the ocean of the world, I can send another upon that whose other land is in eternity!"

And as Mr. Thoroton uttered this horrible speech, his countenance and attitude changed into something so truly diabolical and deadly, that his wife involuntarily shrieked at the sight.

"It shall be done to-night, too! and to-morrow Saul shall know more mysteries than his magic crystal ever showed him, and tell his secret where it shall avail nothing to us who remain behind."

"What shall be done to-night?" demanded Mrs. Thoroton, in terror.

"Just so much as I please, madam, and no more. I have forgotten what I should have talked about, and spoken what should only have been thought on."

Here he paused a few moments, during which, in outward appearance, he became al-

most another man. His accustomed haughty calmness returned, and he observed in a tone of mildness, if not of indifference,—

"Well, Clarice, we are in a dilemma now, and must get out of it as cleanly as we can. But with treason on one side, and suspicion on the other, he must be a good general to keep the field."

"Better beat a safe retreat," replied Mrs. Thoroton, "while the passage is open to us. We have already lost nearly everything that we possessed, and yet the attainment of our object seems further off than ever. Why wait and linger, until the same gulf that has swallowed up our wealth shall also ask for our lives? You know there is no safety here; and to be relieved from this uncertainty and fear, how gladly should I go to a strange land, and be content with the simplest cottage that the wreck of our fortune could provide?"

"And I turn peasant," added Mr. Thoroton, "and fell trees and plough clods, and do the intellectual work of a sowing machine, and shoot wild fowl for my livelihood. A beautiful capital for the column of a poor gentleman's life, most truly."

"And yet even that would be happiness compared with the dreadful prospect that I see in shadows before us here," replied Mrs. Thoroton. "The wildest forest, with peace of mind and security, would be a thousand times preferable to waiting here, watching only the progress of our final ruin."

Mr. Thoroton did not appear to mark these words, for, abruptly turning the conversation to another point, he earnestly inquired,—

"Have you any suspicion, Clarice, can you form any conjecture *how* your sister came to make any search into this matter now? To me it appears a monstrous thing that more than twenty years should elapse, without even a dream or thought of wrong entering her mind, and, at the end of such a lengthened period, that circumstances of some description or other should arise to induce this unexpected investigation. If I find that treacherous villain Saul—"

"It is not improbable, nor inconsistent with his character," said the lady, purposely bringing her husband's speech to a sudden close; "but I am of opinion it originated somewhere else."

"Where else could it originate?—that is impossible."

"Not altogether impossible. In the first place, remember that we do not know that the child was not preserved alive, and by this time may have grown up to be a man. If so, something may have been disclosed on that side. In the second place, I am now about to tell you a secret, for the time has plainly arrived when nothing ought to be held back by either of us from the other, however extravagant it

may appear, and the reason why I never mentioned the subject before was, because I would not unnecessarily or idly run the risk of disturbing your mind upon what might have seemed but a mere fancy of mine, but now I do solemnly assure you that I have some fears—strange and indefinite they are, but still real—that Mr. Hollis is in some way or other at the bottom of the whole matter.”

“Mr. Hollis! Mr. Hollis, the artist?” exclaimed Thoroton.

“Mr. Hollis, the artist,” replied she, “the very same. And now for another secret (you will think I am full of secrets, but never mind)—when you first introduced this Mr. Hollis to me, I was instantly struck with a certain resemblance he has to my sister Lavinia’s late husband Sir Stephen. Not that the features are exactly the same, or the general appearance identical with his, but there is a pervading something or another—an expression, I know not what to term it—perhaps in the eyes, or about the mouth—but, however, be it where it will or what it will, I never see that young man but the spirit of Sir Stephen seems to be about me. It is an insane notion, but I have permitted myself sometimes to think he may even be that baby grown to a man, which we supposed had perished.”

“Fearful secrets these,” replied Mr. Thoroton, smiling, “and proof of no inconsiderable invention in the art of manufacturing phantoms to terrify one’s self.”

“Can it have escaped you what attention Lady Lavinia has always paid him? how she has patronized him? what intense interest she evinces in everything concerning him? Nay, I even have it from one who can scarcely be misinformed, that at the present time she allows him six hundred a year to cover his professional expenses—that she herself partly imagines him to be her son—that he is a foundling, and of precisely that age which gives the conjecture an air of romantic probability. There, Mr. Thoroton, what now do you say to my invention? Where are now my phantoms? Are not these things enough to decide you upon taking energetic steps to avoid ruin and disgrace, and to secure ourselves? Oh, be persuaded by your own arguments, and these facts, and let us escape in time. If we can but be humble, we have yet enough to make us happy, and should be all the happier for knowing at last that though the plot failed, and the estate was lost, our hands have not committed—”

“Stop!” exclaimed Mr. Thoroton. “Only at the last hour of life can a man properly feel entitled to say what his hand *has*, and what it *has not*, done! When circumstances become our master, we must needs obey, and to chalk out one’s future, without knowing what circumstances may render useful, is but the act

of a fool. With respect to this Hollis, if what you have heard be true, I must see him and sift him;—the result will decide subsequent proceedings. But Saul must be stopped at once. Means of persuasion for him are yet left; and they shall be made use of this very night.”

Fain would Mrs. Thoroton have dived more particularly into her husband’s meaning and intentions; for this doubtful and mysterious way of speaking filled her with alarm. But he waved his hand as if to signify that he would be at peace, and hastily quitted the apartment. He then ordered wine to be carried into his private room, and having retired thither, remained alone with the door locked inside, until the fall of positive darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. THOROTON VISITS SAUL; WITH THE CONVERSATION THAT PASSED BETWEEN THEM.—THE FATE OF HOLLIS IS DECIDED.

It was between eight and nine o’clock when Mr. Thoroton again emerged from his room. With a travelling cap on his head, and an ample winter cloak around his body, he passed out into the streets; and having summoned a coach from the nearest stand, threw himself into the seat, and directed the driver to set him down at the corner of a certain lane in Bermondsey. Busily were his thoughts engaged about the business which had brought him out at this unusual hour, and in devising how best to render it successful.

What was the principal object he had in view? To persuade the cunning Saul, the sole possessor of his secret, to keep that secret still inviolate:—to silence him, by fair means and reasonable offers, if he could, but at all events to silence him. No other resource presented itself. This must be done, or all else must be undone. “But how shall it be effected?” he asked of himself. “The villain I have to deal with is deep and hypocritical: and now everything depends upon which proves the deepest of the two.”

Mr. Thoroton was no novice in the knowledge of human nature. Long observant of the manners and temperaments of mankind, he had not failed to detect the common fault and absurdity of which nearly all men are guilty, in finding fault with those whom they wish to reform, and in abusing and insulting the vices which they would destroy. Blind as bats in daylight, to the simple fact that fault-finding, however just, and contemptuous treatment, however deserved, never fail to put the indivi-

deals subjected to it strongly on the defensive; and to make them plead every imaginable justification for the very errors and crimes with the guilt of which they are charged. Such mistaken policy, instead of conciliating, does but make enemies of them; and to make of the man you would persuade an opponent at the outset is the most certain way of rendering persuasion impossible. Through this pervasiveness, indeed, the vices of one portion of society are rendered by the other permanent and perpetual. The fancied good condemn, and despise, and turn away from the bad,—treat the man and the vice as exactly one and the same thing; and forgetting that pity, rather than indignation, should direct all attempts at reformation, they do but set at bay, and in violent opposition, those whom they else would certainly win over by kind persuasion, and the display of a true solicitude for their own welfare.

The monstrous and pervading error of conduct like this was early apparent to the keen perception of Mr. Thoroton. And as with bodies, so with individuals; he knew that in the present case, if his opponent, the astrologer, were to be won at all, it must be done by conciliation and mildness, not by reproaches and upbraidings, which only close faster the doors we attempt to open.

The frame of mind may readily be appreciated, then, in which the individual of whom we are speaking, found himself freed of his conveyance, and traversing on foot the perplexed by-streets and narrow passages leading to the old tumble-down tenement still inhabited by Saul. That road was nothing new to the feet that now trod its rugged, dilapidated, and miry surface; for often before, in summer's twilight, and in winter's chilly blackness, alike, had Mr. Thoroton passed, like a solitary shadow, beneath the bent and swerving walls which leaned over, or away from, the causeways on either side.

And now appeared again the diminutive casement, covered inside with a red curtain, through which a dim and lurid light was cast upon the mis-shapen projection of an adjoining bulk of chimneys; and that marked the apartment within which this solemn charlatan, Saul, manufactured his medicinal mysteries for "fortifying life, and hindering the coming on of age."

Shortly after Mr. Thoroton had rapped at the too-well-known door, a light shot through the keyhole, and in the next instant Saul himself—who appeared to be his own servant—stood before him.

"Ah!" exclaimed Saul, "Mr. Thoroton tonight! Well, sir, well! Good even to you! I am not surprised at it; strange business will necessitate strange times; and," he added aside, "the fish that refuses the bait at noon will fol-

low it again before midnight." Then again raising his voice—"My best distillations pass over between twelve and three; though the philosophy of it is beyond my comprehension."

He then carefully fastened the door, and conducted his visitor up stairs and along a dusky passage, not, as might be imagined, to some low-roofed, squalid apartment, such only as the building and the situation might be supposed able to afford, but into a spacious and lofty room, at the further end of which glowed a comfortable fire, and which was amply furnished with articles as costly and unique as might well be found out of any noble residence in London. Numerous pictures in no contemptible style of art, adorned the walls; and over the mantel-piece, which was of sculptured marble, hung two portraits, one of Saul himself, and the other of a woman of middle age, dark, gipsy-like, but much above the ordinary standard of beauty. These of course were modern.

The eyes of Mr. Thoroton were scarcely turned from the last-named portrait before they fell, with a startling kind of surprise, upon a lady evidently the original of it, who sat, in a deep half-shadow, beside the fire-place.

"My daughter Agatha!" said Saul, as he introduced Mr. Thoroton, and at the same moment turned towards the lady, and repeated that gentleman's name, with the remark, "you will remember having met each other once before."

Agatha rose into the light, with her eyes fixed sternly, but calmly, on the countenance of Mr. Thoroton. The latter avoided meeting that gaze, and involuntarily turned his looks upon the ground. The vaults of the Adelphi, the miserable bedroom, and the roof, were alone before his eyes. Saul quietly observed this little scene with malicious satisfaction during the space of a few moments, and then requesting Mr. Thoroton to be seated, and placing a huge key in the hands of his daughter, with some whispered directions which could not be overheard, again observed aloud, as Agatha quitted the room,—

"Hospitality, sir, is a duty as well as a virtue; and the more particularly so when a man's best benefactor honors such a very humble dwelling as this is with his presence. And yet you may observe, Mr. Thoroton," continued Saul,—as he eyed the contents of the apartment with evident satisfaction, "that a little wealth enables one, even in such a poor place as this, to display more taste than the rough outside would warrant."

"For all which I have paid!" thought Thoroton with inward bitterness; but he too strongly felt the part he had to play to say so. Instead, he passed off these cutting remarks by lightly observing in reply,—

"Why, yes—your taste in pictures appears

both keen and learned, if I am to judge by the specimens on the walls. By whom are these portraits painted?"

"They are the works of a very rising young artist whom I have encouraged a little—Mr. Launcelot Widge; a name, sir, which, though it does not exactly sound as meant for immortality——"

"Not exactly," observed Thoroton.

"No, sir, but nevertheless——"

At this juncture Agatha re-entered with a couple of odd shaped bottles upon a silver waiter, and two glasses, whose fineness and fashion bespoke their age and rarity. Having placed them on the table, she again retired.

"This wine, Mr. Thoroton, you must I think pronounce inimitable; it is the age of a patriarch, three score and ten, and at this time——"

"No wine for me," interrupted the individual addressed, in a somewhat haughty tone, "the business upon which I am come to-night will need no help to give it heat, I fear."

Saul placed his forefinger gently upon the last speaker's wrist as he observed—

"The words spoken elsewhere, Mr. Thoroton, must not be remembered or regarded beneath this roof-tree. You are my guest; I have the greatest reason to say rather my generous friend, for, is it not to you that I stand indebted?"

"Truly, by the heavens above us!" exclaimed Thoroton, passionately, "and therefore I ought never to be betrayed!"

"Harsh words, harsh words!" Saul ejaculated, "and, as yet, untrue. Possibilities have been pointed at, for a man may be driven to he knows not what; but, so far, you are safe as ever, and have not been betrayed. Arrangements, accommodations, these may always be entered into, *unless delayed until it is too late*, and becomes impossible."

"What arrangements, what accommodations, lie in my power to make? Is it not solely because the continuance of these accommodations has failed that I am placed in this extremity of doubt? I who have relied confidently upon your good faith, and on the security of donations continued until they have become longer impossible?"

"There are yet certain contingencies undiscussed," said Saul, "as, for instance in case of the death of the Lady of Woodhouselee, every thing then must be yours. Your impossibilities are then at an end; might there be no promissory share of that for me? For I deem it but just and right that, as both of us will have equally helped to get it, both should divide the spoil."

"Very just and very right," exclaimed Thoroton, ironically, "that you should have been paid nearly the whole of my actual fortune to secure the chance of another, and when that

other is obtained, that you should take it. But you overlook another and a very probable contingency. Suppose that instead of this happening, I fail altogether, am I to receive back all that I have given you? Suppose that the child is now surviving, that Lady Lavinia discovers it, what is to atone for my losses and my disgrace?"

"The consciousness of having done our best," sarcastically replied the astrologer, "too often becomes our only comfort. But twenty and odd years have elapsed, and discoveries of that kind are out of the question."

"Not wholly so."

"Not wholly so? Has anything, then, come to light?"

"So much, I believe, that all which you could now do in the way of making disclosures, would but help to confirm the truth of a discovery already made. Nothing, in that sense, could be gained by treachery, if you be capable of such, except some perhaps slight additional injury to myself, and to you the punishment due to a participator, an accessory, as well as the lasting and ineffaceable infamy of having sold one whom you were bound to cover and protect. And whether it be worth while, after all that I have done to serve you, to do so much for so slight a purpose, may safely be left to your own sense to consider."

By thus twisting the actual facts, and as it were showing the viper that his sting had become useless, did Mr. Thoroton secretly hope to persuade him from any attempt to make use of it.

"If that be the case," Saul replied, "what need of this excitement and anxiety respecting any course that I may find it necessary to take?"

"I am anxious that you should avoid such deep disgrace," answered the other, "without any adequate motive or consideration."

"Oh, as for that matter, every man is the protector of his own honor."

"He ceases to be its protector," said Mr. Thoroton, "when he declares himself ready to sacrifice it for the most paltry of considerations, perhaps even for worse than nothing."

"And does it then become your duty, or the duty of the first honorable Quixote who may discover the wrong, to protect it for him?"

Mr. Thoroton could have made a bitter reply, but prudence withheld it. He simply said,—

"It certainly becomes the duty of a friend to advise and warn him."

Saul burst into a sneering kind of laugh, as he exclaimed, "Surely, never before did poor honor fall to be discussed by such a goodly couple! Why, sir, to speak the truth, there is not so much honor in either of us as would pass current for a beggar's rag. Pshaw! I disclaim it altogether. We are discussing a

question that neither of us know anything about. But pray, Mr. Thoroton, if this boy is found, may I ask where it was, how it was, and who is he? Or rather, who he has *seemed* to be hitherto? It may be needful, sir," added Saul, in a low but earnest tone, "*for your safety* and for mine, to do something with him. You understand, sir, new circumstances require new remedies; and self-preservation is the first law, after all."

Thoroton looked at the speaker as though he would penetrate his very soul.

"Are you sincere?" he demanded.

"As oak is sound," was the reply.

"Then that once well effected will decide the question. I can easily decoy him here, and the rest is soon completed. This muddy channel beneath your window is never searched?"

"Never, it is safer than the churchyard."

"How much better is this," exclaimed Thoroton, in the satisfaction of the moment, "than dragging each other headlong to disgrace and ruin! And now, Saul, for the pledge of agreement in a bumper."

"With all my heart," cried Saul, as he filled the two glasses, "and success to the enterprise!"

The two drank off their liquor together, but silence had fallen upon the tongues of both. Neither spoke: for the weight of contemplated death—death, foul and secret—lay heavily upon the imagination of each.

Afterwards, however, their conversation, as well as the subject of it, was renewed and protracted until almost the hour of midnight: Mr. Thoroton fully informing Saul, of all which his wife had that evening communicated to him; and concluding with a distinct understanding from that cold-blooded miscreant that, in case it should be found advisable to destroy Mr. Hollis, the simple plan to get him in a convenient place should be this: That Mr. Thoroton should send for, or wait upon, Hollis, on pretence of having procured him a commission to paint the portrait of Saul himself at his own house in Bermondsey. For that purpose he should bring him down at such a convenient time as might be secretly agreed upon between themselves; he should have his first sitting, be detained to a late dinner, kept in conversation or play, until either excess of wine, or the loneliness of the hour, afforded the desired opportunity, and then with all speed and silence be despatched; and afterwards lowered from the window into the undisturbed bed of slime over which dully moved the black waters below.

But a written agreement was previously signed by Mr. Thoroton, and delivered to Saul, in which he bound himself, in case the conspiracy succeeded, and in consideration of valuable services received, to pay into the hands of

the said Saul, the sum of one thousand pounds sterling.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEREIN MR. HOLLIS PASSES AN EVENING IN THE SOCIETY OF LAUNCELOT WIDGE AND RICHARD STRETCHER, ESQUIRES.

ALMOST contemporaneous with the arrangements entered into between Mr. Thoroton and the astrologer, as previously recorded, were made arrangements by Mr. Sandhill and Hollis for securing an interview with Saul. The coincidence which was about to bring together two people who, unknown to each other, felt so strong an interest in the meeting, might be deemed singular enough, but so it was.

Our young artist was sitting one morning, not many days after the events last described, before his easel, upon which stood an unfinished picture worthy of the youth of Anthony Vandyke, when a friendly knock saluted the door of his study, and Mr. Thoroton entered. Since last these individuals met, so much concerning either had become known to each that a visible change passed over the countenances of both when their eyes first met. Mr. Thoroton, however, was too experienced an actor upon the stage of life to suffer any betrayal of his inward thoughts and feelings on that account. He accosted Hollis with more than usual cordiality, and spoke with high though affected enthusiasm of the new picture before him. He promised his immortality, while contemplating his destruction; and, while holding out the dazzling glories of the future, sought to hide the dark shadows which were gathering round the present.

"I hope," he remarked, with a great appearance of self-satisfaction—"I flatter myself, Mr. Hollis, that I have obtained for you a commission of some value. It is for a portrait, to be sure, but I think such entire deference will be paid to your judgment in the matter, that at your own discretion an elaborate picture may be produced, rather than the mere resemblance of a man. The character, too, is admirably adapted for the canvas—striking individuality and picturesque to an extreme. The gentleman is somewhat eccentric, and though sufficiently wealthy, prefers passing his life in a wretched habitation in Bermondsey rather than in some respectable neighborhood on this side of the Thames. Possibly you may have seen him, he is sometimes at my residence—dresses like a Turk, and passes under the name of Saul.

"The very man," thought Hollis, "that Mr. Sandhill told me about, and whom he wished to find. This is lucky, indeed."

"He has sent once already to a very inferior artist, but is dissatisfied with the picture."

"And pray, sir," asked Hollis, "what may be that artist's name?"

"Widge, I believe," replied Thoroton.

"I have seen his name in the catalogues," observed the other, adding, mentally, "and will next see him. Perhaps Mr. Widge may know sufficient of Saul to enable him to forward our inquiries." Then again speaking aloud, he inquired the exact address of Saul, and any other such particulars as appeared to him at all calculated to facilitate the objects Mr. Sandhill and himself had in view. Satisfied upon these points, Mr. Hollis resolved to lose no time in introducing himself, as well as he could, to Mr. Launcelet Widge. This resolution he therefore carried into effect during the evening of that same day.

Having sent up his card, the maid soon returned to Mr. Hollis with an invitation to him to ascend the staircase, on the landing, and just outside the painting-room door, he was met by a young gentleman in a dressing-gown, wearing an immense harvest of hair on his head, and a pair of huge moustaches of the color of oxide of iron. For after this fashion had Mr. Launcelet transmogrified his personal appearance since we last parted with him.

"How do, sir, how do?" said Launcey. "Mr. Hollis, the artist, I suppose? Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hollis. The liberal professions should be friendly with one another, though they're often more like unpegged crabs in a fish-basket—too fond of snapping one another's claws off. Walk in and take a seat,—only Mrs. Widge and a friend with me."

Launce then proceeded *pro forma* to introduce Hollis to his wife and Mr. Richard Stretcher, and as Stretcher and himself happened to be smoking cigars, he next invited his new visitor to join them at a puff. Hollis felt surprised at this unceremonious familiarity, but declined the invitation.

"Never smoke! astonishing!" said Launcey. "We never smoke, not often, do we, Stretcher? No, I guess not much," and he rounded off the sentiment with a vulgar laugh.

"We like to be in the clouds sometimes," observed Richard; "I think it raises one's soul above the dross of the world, and helps to idealize the common stuff of life."

"Exactly, Stretcher, my boy!" answered Launcey; "a good Havanna is the same thing to this life as smoke to a bad picture,—it makes the worst parts look better, and the better, better still."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Richard; "dig that vein deeper, Launce, and you'll get at a bit of poetry in five or six more fathoms. Your strata ar'n't all common clay and red sand, if you do but sink low enough."

"Now I come to think," said Mr. Widge,

addressing Hollis, "I've heard your name mentioned accidentally in miscellaneous conversation, by a sitter of mine in Bermondsey, yonder; old Turkey Rhubarb, you know, Stretcher?"

"Most probably," replied Hollis, "a man named Saul you allude to. And, *apropos*, it was for the purpose of asking a few questions about him that I took the liberty of calling upon you."

"Say nothin' about liberty here," returned Launce; "this is Liberty Hall;—don't mention it. Nobody can take any liberty with me. I'm an artist, and my notion of an artist is that he should be free and easy,—open to all, influenced by none, as them independent slaves to every body says in their newspapers."

"By-the-by!" exclaimed Richard, in a startling voice, "talking of newspapers, that reminds me of a criticism in the *Observer* on your Hercules, Mr. Widge. I saw it at the coffee-house this morning; and by way of saving the expense of a newspaper, cut it out with my penknife while the waiter was gone for change. Here it is."

And Mr. Stretcher produced from his waistcoat-pocket, and read, the following paragraph:—

"No. 742. *Hercules strangling the Serpents*.—WIDGE. We do not remember having before seen this name inscribed on the walls of the artistic temple of fame, though it promises to be as enduring as the stones of those walls themselves. The production under notice is full of promise; though we regret to say it is so placed as to render an examination of it impossible. The twisting of the serpents is very fine, as are also the brown tints of the flesh, and the anatomical markings of the figure through a prodigious flow of magnificent drapery. We cordially extend the hand of welcome to Mr. Widge, and place him in one of the foremost niches of the national pantheon."

"There, my boy,—what say you to that? How does your heart feel? Arn't your lungs full of laughing-gas, you clever dog, eh? There,—take the paragraph, and get it framed and glazed. It is your diploma from the College of Critics; and ought to be hung up over your chimney-piece to shame envy, and silence the tongue of slander."

"Humph! pretty well," remarked Launce, as he perused the "critique" again; "but they might have laid it on a bit thicker about the composition, and Griesbach's principle of light and shadow. Though it's very well, considering the Academy would only let people see the picture in the dark. What is your opinion of my Hercules, Mr. Hollis?"

"The pleasure of seeing it is yet to come, as far as I am concerned," he replied.

"Then you'll be delighted, sir," answered

Widge; "it is the best thing I have done since old Turkey Rhubarb's portrait."

"You must have made him in love with his own face," observed Hollis, "for he appeared inclined to have another painted."

"Happy to hear it," said Launcey: "and thanks to you for bringing me such good news. I want a few commissions more, for of late my practice has declined!"

"I do not make myself properly understood, I fear," remarked Mr. Hollis, somewhat embarrassed; "I should have said a—a, in fact,—a—the truth is, Saul has intimated, I believe, that he wishes me to try the next—"

"Oh! yourself, you mean? Oh! very well; that is another thing. Then I wish you joy of his phiz, and safe of his money. He is the ugliest devil that ever walked on two legs, and as keen after cash as a leach for blood. He'll take lots of asphaltum for his shadows, and yellow ochre in his lights: remember, I have done him once, and know by experience. His nose is very difficult too; one can hardly get the expression of it."

"I shall be most happy to resign my interest in the matter to your hands," said Hollis; "for really my engagements are many, and the commission might be of service to you."

"Very kind," answered Mr. Widge; "very moderate and generous. To speak the truth, I should really feel obliged to you; for I owe an old usurer fifteen hundred pounds,—five of it for interest for six months,—and if I can paint him another picture he shall find me too deep for him. I'll charge him a cool three hundred for it, and deduct the same from my payment."

"Then, pray, what or who is he? Does he lend money—?"

"He lends money," said Launcey, "and scrapes money, and extorts money, and he may steal it besides for aught I know; but I do know he worships it, and would do any thing to get it, short of putting his neck into hemp. Why, he one day let slip a few words to me when he was praising his own ingenuity, which showed what he really is, rather more than he perhaps intended. He told me that he had worked a good fortune out of a gentleman named Thoroton, by threatening, time after time, to discover a secret which, if told, might send that same gentleman to dance before the sheriff in a nightcap, or to assist the works of the government at Botany Bay. He might think what he liked about it, but for my own part, I considered he was privy to a murder, or something of that sort."

"Is it possible?" Hollis ejaculated, almost involuntarily.

"It's a fact!" said Launcey; "a 'great fact,' as newspaper scribblers say. Only look at him,—only see him, as I have when painting his portrait, and if there is not the very devil in

his looks, may I drink salt-water after supper every night of my life!"

"He did not tell you the secret itself, then?"

"Trust him for that!" Mr. Widge replied.

"No, no; not he! He rather seemed to think he had told too much already, because he afterwards tried to pass it off as a joke, but that was no go with me. I am a boy that knows better by two halves than to be humbugged in that manner."

Here was matter for Mr. Hollis to think upon, in addition to what was already known. Taken together, they left upon his mind no doubt whatever, but that the secret alluded to was in reference to the Lady Lavinia's child—to himself. The literal truth of the whole affair flashed upon his mind—though at present only in the shape of a conjecture—in a moment. He saw that Thoroton had exposed him in the low kitchen of the skeleton-house,—that Mrs. Smith had almost miraculously been sent that same night for his salvation,—that Saul was in some way or other acquainted with the proceeding, but that neither he nor Mr. Thoroton could trace him any further, or knew to a certainty whether he was or was not now alive.

Gratified, to a greater extent than it was needful to acknowledge, with the information he had received, Mr. Hollis would now have taken his leave; but Launcelot felt his own situation just then too keenly to lose the opportunity, if he could help it, of securing in his friendship a young man who appeared likely to be capable of some future service to him. He, therefore positively insisted upon Hollis's staying to supper with them—repeated his delight with the chance that had brought them together, and eventually succeeded in detaining him until a somewhat untimely hour. During the course of his stay, Mr. Hollis learned sufficient of the character of his new acquaintance, to induce him to conceive some interest in the fate of the young lady, whose misfortune it was to be united to such a heedless simpleton—as was her husband—to regret the follies and misplaced exertions, rather than abilities, of Mr. Widge, and to conclude, in reference to that shallow and essentially selfish pretender, Mr. Richard Stretcher, that the sooner he chanced to meet with some one who would give him a kicking, the better it would be for his own interest, and for that of society at large, amongst whom he now contrived to maintain a sponging and mischievous existence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. WIDGE IN TROUBLE, IS COMFORTED BY STRETCHER—THE LAY-FIGURE ARRESTED—GABRIEL'S RECONCILIATION, AND PROMISE OF AN ODD STORY.

LEAVING, for the present, Mr. Hollis and the party with whom he was so intimately connected, to follow out their future and final plans, let us return to the history of those old acquaintances to whom, in the preceding chapter, we have been introduced.

Up to the present time no trace whatever had been discovered of the thieves who had carried away young Mr. Widge's money. The usual "sagacity" of the police seemed temporarily to have forsaken that cunning body, and Bowstreet, for once, was at a stand still. Launcelot fell short of cash, and the expediency of becoming remarkably civil to creditors had long been made apparent. In vain was Mr. Gabriel Widge applied to; he had fully resolved to reform his son at the hands of necessity, before again supporting him on his brilliant march to professional honor and immortality. At the same time it was observed that Gabriel never—as might have been expected—materially lamented the heavy loss which his son had sustained; but rather, on the contrary, seemed to chuckle with inward and malicious satisfaction that the daring deed had, as he expressed it, "saved Launcy from doing seven hundred pounds worth more harm."

Neither did Launcelot's wife exercise her acknowledged privilege of keeping continually in hot water upon the subject, which so many wives would have done. So far from it, this simple young woman very childishly concluded that her husband must suffer aggravation enough, without any assistance from her tongue; and that to add reproaches to misfortune, and complainings and regrets to suffering, was both inhuman and mischievous. By this imprudent and unusual course of conduct she certainly secured some trifle of additional comfort, and rendered more permanent the heavenly blessing of domestic peace: but then, what is comfort compared to the pleasure of continually reminding your husband of his errors and his losses—none of which a good husband ought ever to have; and what is the value of domestic peace when weighed against the supreme felicity of telling the partner of your life, a thousand times over, what a mistaken man and a thorough simpleton you think him.

Married ladies of courage and spirit never sacrifice their sense of right, and their knowledge of the truth, to paltry home considerations of this kind;—personal independence demands that they should say all they think and feel, without regard to other persons' thoughts and feelings, and in total contempt of consequences. It is for women slaves, not free wives, to

calculate results; just as plainly as it is the bounden duty of all husbands worth having, never to fall into error, and never to get by any means into a state of poverty. But, as we have seen, Mrs. Launcelot did the very contrary of all this, and consequently she was not a woman either of courage or of spirit.

But with this single exception, Mr. Widge, junior, found himself in a very awkward predicament. Difficulties were springing up around him with the rapidity of beds of nettles about a ruin; and every night-mare that he had was sure to be in the form of a bailiff, or some Jewish demon of a sponging-house. Already were his rings and his pins, his watches and plate, finding their way to the pawnbroker's; while his least valuable garments were almost weekly sent to stuff the bags of the old-clothesmen. His conversations with Richard Stretcher concerning the powers possessed by that interesting class of beings termed creditors became numerous and intensely absorbing; the more especially as Mr. Stretcher himself was extensively acquainted with the tribe in question, and had suffered like a martyr from their proverbial intolerance and demoniacal spirit of persecution. Richard told him how, on one occasion, it was his own unhappy fate to dwell in a lodging-house, every individual inmate of which was laboring under the last symptoms of the malady of owing money—without ~~the~~ power to pay it. A kind of council of war was called, as if by common consent, to consider of the best means to be adopted in this dreadful emergency,—for not a soul of them all dared to show himself out of doors, and the entrance was kept perpetually locked. By breaking a hole in the fan-light sufficiently large to admit of the passage of an arm, they were supplied with victuals and drink by certain friendly powers with whom the besieged party were in league outside; and thus the domestic fortress held out above six weeks. At length, in the dark of one fatal morning, they were taken by surprise, and the whole garrison surrendered to an army of bailiffs that marched in. A strategic sweep, who wanted a job, had undertaken the dark enterprise of descending one of the flues and throwing open the gates; and thus fell a place of strength which the neighbors began to consider as impregnable. Launcelot heard this anecdote with sympathetic horror, and instantly began to consider what mysterious corners and secret passages existed for himself, in case he should unexpectedly be called upon by one of those terrible characters whose tap upon the shoulder is only less dreadful than that of death himself. "Every tap at the street door, common or uncommon, became painfully attractive to his ears; inasmuch that both the butcher's boy and the postman—for Launcy knew that your bailiff comes with all sorts of deceptive knocks—had at different times fright-

shed him half out of his wits. Within a few days after Mr. Hollis's visit to him, Mr. Widge deemed it prudent to cause all inquiries respecting himself to be, in the first instance, answered by his wife, in order that any sudden surprise might be prevented, and the business of applicants accurately ascertained before the granting of an interview.

Under this peculiarly unpleasant and nervous position of affairs, Launcelot might one afternoon have been seen sitting before his easel, busily engaged upon a portrait of his own glorious self, and for the especial service of which, indeed, he had been recently engaged in cultivating that head of hair, and those rusty-colored moustaches, which we found adorning his person upon our re-introduction. Genius, everybody knows, is occasionally eccentric,—apt to shoot off into unexpected quirks, and prone to the performance of certain actions, which the more sober and considerate part of the world would strive to avoid, from the salutary fear of getting laughed at. Consequently, we shall not feel surprised to find that on the occasion in question the overwhelming talents of Mr. Widge had led him in a moment of enthusiasm to clothe his lay-figure in his full-dress suit, while he himself plied away at the picture in his dressing-gown.

Now, for the information of our lay as well as clerical readers, we may passingly observe that an artist's lay-figure is a skilful mechanical imitation of the human form, of the size of life, carved out of wood, and ingeniously provided with complex double-acting joints, so as to enable it to assume any attitude in which the painter may desire to have it fixed. From this brief description it will at once be seen that, to the uninitiated, a lay-figure, when properly clothed, either as an ancient Roman in the classical toga, or as a modern Launcelot Widge in full dress-coat, white waistcoat, and black kerseymeres, is no contemptible or easily misunderstood representative of its respective prototype. In fact, it is a figure that from time out of mind has been of marvellous utility to artists, not only with respect to the difficulties of their profession, but in those also of love, and debt, and danger in every various shape in which the untoward world delights, at times, to harass these praise-worthy and pleasing ornaments of its else dry and plodding existence.

Mr. Widge's lay-figure, then, clothed in the artist's own habiliments, was sentimentally reclined in an easy-chair, with the chin resting on the right-hand, and the face—upon which Launcy had stuck a ferocious-looking mask—turned upwards as though in the depth of sublime contemplation, while Launcy himself sat before it as already described, and forgetful of all the world, and all that it contained besides. Suddenly some one knocked at the street-door.

The maid flew to it, Mrs. Widge flew on to the stairs to listen, and if needful, to deny her husband, while Launcy himself jumped off his stool, and applied his ear to the door.

Shortly he overheard himself asked for, and his wife, in reply, inquire the name and business of the stranger.

"I must see him," observed the other, "private business—can't leave any message—a personal affair—writ!"

"Writ!" repeated Launcy, in horror, "then it's time I started."

At the same moment he heard the stranger struggling up-stairs in the very teeth of Amelia's protestations that her husband was not at home, and declaring that he would in that case wait until he did come.

In the next instant Launcelot vanished into a closet, just in time to hear his painting-room door slammed open, and heavy feet tramp hastily on the floor, while Amelia vociferated from behind,

"I tell you Mr. Widge is not at home; he cannot be seen, and I beg you will leave the house."

"Oh, ain't he at home, though," exclaimed the intruder, whose eyes now fell upon the lay-figure; "but I've nabbed my gentleman! You'll please to walk with me, Mr. Widge."

And the stranger fixed his eyes upon the lay-figure with every mark of satisfaction and triumph, while Launcy himself, with his eye to the closet key-hole, beheld this farcical mistake with equally elated feelings.

"It ain't of no use shamming deaf," said the stranger again; "look at this, Mr. Widge," and he poked a paper directly before the mask on the wooden face of the debtor. Having allowed a few seconds to elapse, he suddenly seized his prisoner by the arm as though about to hurry him away, when feeling the limb so stiff and rigid, and seeing the body at the same time fall as it were lifeless to the floor, he started back in terror, and uttering a fearful cry under the impression that he had, perhaps, frightened Mr. Widge to death, he rushed out of the room, and down stairs again, with the velocity of a burglar, and bouncing into the street, vanished round the first corner like a flash of lightning.

This lucky incident mightily relieved Launcy's fears for the moment, but failed to weaken permanently the dreadful impression he had conceived of his present situation. What was to be done? The prison gates were opening before him, and no immediate means presented themselves by which he could hope to escape. His friend Stretcher's ingenious plan of marrying Miss Josey Chuckchin, and thus enabling himself to assist Launcelot with a loan out of her fortune, had most egregiously failed. Nothing was to be looked for in that quarter. Launcy sipped his tea that night with greater

solemnity than was displayed by Socrates over his cup of hemlock; he was lost in vain attempts to resolve that most abstruse of all philosophical questions, how shall the vacuum of the pocket be filled with filthy lucre when none exists with which to fill it? And yet it must be filled. He wrote a very moving and pathetic note to his father, Mr. Gabriel Widge, stating what had occurred, begging him to take the helm of his vessel under his own paternal management at the present dangerous crisis, expressing his sincere repentance for what was passed, and promising most faithfully never again to offend in a similar manner, if but this time he might be delivered from his difficulties, and be forgiven. This epistle was despatched immediately to St. Martin's Lane; and about eight o'clock in the evening Mr. Gabriel Widge was announced.

"Be you quite sure it's him, Mealy," said Launcelot to his wife, "look well at him plump in the face before you let him come upstairs."

"Oh, you may depend upon me, my dear!" replied the young lady, as she vanished out of his sight.

Nevertheless, Launcelot deemed it but an act of common prudence, considering what had so recently happened, to stand with the closet door ajar, ready to disappear, in case any stratagem should chance to be in progress. But the voice of the true Gabriel soon relieved his palpitating heart, as he entered the room, remarking—

"Well, Launcy, my boy! I'm glad to see you perched on the stool of repentance at last, very glad, I am. Your tears of compunction ought by rights to have flowed above six months ago; but never mind, let us hope they are all the more redundant now they are come."

"How do you do, pa?" said Launcy, half laughing, "I'm very glad to see you, never was more pleased in my life."

"No, you young dog!" exclaimed Gabriel, "of course you never was. I'm come to help you out of such a thick mud as you never was in before, and so you are all the better pleased. That is it—I know how it is very well."

"Will you take brandy, whisky, rum, or blue ruin, pa?" demanded Launcelot.

"What! my boy. And do you keep all four sperits in your sideboard even now?"

"Oh, no, pa," replied the son, as he rapidly locked the door of a cheffonier and put the key in his pocket—"there's plenty of empty bottles in here, rainbows of the sunshine gone by; but now when I want anything of that kind I send out for it in half-quarters. I only asked to know what I should send for."

"Glad to find you so economical," replied Gabriel, "for eight half-quarters go farther than a pint for the same money. You've dis-

covered the right road at last, Launcy; only, my boy, take care that them half-quarters doesn't bring you to the gin-palace at last. I'll tell you what, my lad. If I had not seen that paragraph in the *Observer* about me, I don't think I should have come here to-night."

"About you, pa?"

"Yes, about me. Didn't I sit for that Hercules of yours,—isn't a portrait of me as a baby?"

"Oh, I understand you now! Well, pa, and what did you think of it?"

"Think of it!—what did I think of it? Why, the writer of that paragraph understands British composition better than Addison; he's more flowery than Doctor Blackmore, and as peremptory as Doctor Johnson. Talk about rounding sentences! why he rounds that paragraph as true as if it was turned in a lathe. He brings the Temple of Fame in uncommonly well, and claps you into a nitch as comfortable as if you were ready done in marble. Keep that temple in view, my boy—learn to despise segars,—don't be seduced by beef-steak suppers and oyster sauce, and then you may live to be buried in Westminster Abbey, followed by all the students of the Royal Academy. That paragraph, Launcy, has giv me very great hopes of you, only steady, my boy, steady! Only look at what you've brought yourself to now—arrests hanging over your head—all the prisons in London gaping for you, and yourself but the mangled remains of what you once was. And all that without saying a word about what money it costs besides!"

"Well, pa—if you'll pull me out of this quagmire, and scrape me clean once more, I shall turn over a new leaf, and swim through the rest of my life as white as a swan—don't you think I shall, Mealy?"

"Oh, yes—I do hope so—to be sure you will!"

"It does me good to hear you say so, Launcy," observed Gabriel, in a tone which seemed to indicate that he felt rather affected; "you must have suffered like a martyr before now, I know you must. That robbery made a great inroad on your happiness, Launcy, didn't it?"

"It was the worst battering ram as ever hit my walls," replied the young man.

"Well, my boy—what should you think if you heard it was all a hoax?" and Gabriel burst into as loud a fit of laughter as though he had suddenly opened to himself the first scene of a new farce.

"What do you mean, pa?"

"It was a trick of mine, my boy—a grand practical lesson to teach you wisdom. Me and Missis Neverdone managed the whole thing ourselves, and your seven hundred pounds is now safely lodged, in your own name, at Bingham's bank!"

"Huzza!" cried Launcy, "nine times nine and one cheer more. Mealy, liberate a bottle of cham—no, no, I don't mean that—I was only going to say so by way of a joke. But I'll have arf a pint of arf-an-arf just to drink good luck in."

"Well, I felt sure, my boy, when I laid that 'ere stratterjim, that it would operate on you very effectually, by putting the valley of money in a peccolior striking point of view; and at the same time read you a text in golden letters on the transitory nature of sublunary fortune, and prove that 'steadiest goes when steadiest blows.'"

"It has made me as deep again as I was before," replied Launcelot, "and as fond of money as the most generous parent could desire. In short, I should preciously like to have two more sevens put to that one in the bank, then there would be fifteen to pay old Rhubarb, and six left for the privacy of my own pocket and living. That is exactly how I *might* be happily restored on my legs again, if but my respected father was like *some* fathers."

"He is like some fathers," solemnly replied Mr. Widge, senior, as he eyed his son with an expression of surprise and scorn; "he is like too many fathers, my boy; he is, though he says it himself, too tender and too soft."

"Can't be; it's contrary to nature. The softer as fathers is to their sons, the better they are, the more they like them, and the oftener they squeeze 'em. But what do you really think, pa, about that suggestion of mine? One's outer garment of respectability is every thing, and there is no respectability without money."

"And very often none with it, Launcy, except in the opinions of them metaphysical people who openly proclaim the doctrine that respectability is made at the tailor's—a thing that has more reason on its side than the world in general supposes."

"Exactly what I was saying, pa! that's the invisible sting of my argument. But do you know, pa, I have got another order for a portrait from old Saul le Blanc. However, it looks like it, for he giv' the order to another artist, and that artist has turned it over to me."

"Curious way of doing business," observed Gabriel. "What artist was it?"

"Mr. Hollis."

"Hollis! Do you say so? Why, Launcy, it is like a visitation of Providence. It's the very name that strange lady mentioned, and I knew nothing about it."

"What strange lady?" asked Launce, with surprise.

"I'll tell you, my boy, for it made your mother very uneasy again, and I perceived myself that it was an uncommon job, and as thick set with hobstacles as a brush with bristles. But I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. GABRIEL WIDGE—MRS. WIDGE, AND THE MYSTERIOUS LADY—A REVELATION.

"Not long since," began Gabriel, "one day in the afternoon, a fine looking lady—and your purfession, my boy, has larnt me the principal points of female beauty—a fine female figure, walks into my place in St. Martin's-lane and inquires for me. I was upstairs at my ease after dinner, just then, and the maid mistook her to say *Mrs.* Widge instead of *Mr.* Your mother, of course, ordered her into a solitary room; after due inquiries, and having set herself a little straight and tidy, went off to see who it was and what she wanted. But in a minute or two, she bounces back again, and setting her eyes on me like a pointer, says she, 'It is you, sir, that the *lady* wishes to see—and she looks as if she did—and not your poor wife.' I riz from the table in course, straightened my waistcoat, pulled my collars up, and went off into the room where she sat. She was remarkably well-dressed, and had a long black veil hanging down by the side of her face. After inquiring if I could be of any service to her, 'The truth is, Mr. Widge,' says she, 'that depends almost entirely upon circumstances. Can you, sir, in any manner call to mind having ever seen me before?'

"I am not aware, ma'am," says I, 'that I ever enjoyed that pleasure till this moment.' For I thought it right to be complimentary in this mysterious case, lest anything should be lost unawares by seeming otherwise. But before she could answer I heard your mother give a sharp "hem!"—a werry severe unindeed, just outside the door."

"Your recollection does not carry you, in this instance, so far back as more than twenty years ago," says she.

"Not in the least, ma'am," says I, looking at her very intensely, but she blushed and turned her head aside.

"I am ashamed to put these questions, sir," says she, 'but it is needful. Then I presume you do not remember a very stormy night much about the same time since?'

"No more than if it had never happened, ma'am," says I, 'for you see, ma'am, there has been so many more of the same sort since, that one puts another out of one's head.'

"Unless some particular circumstance," says she, 'occurring then, should impress it more strongly on the memory.' At that Launcy, your mother, giv' a tremenjous *hem!* which made the lady look rather astonished, and turned my face, I believe, as purple as a pickling cabbage. I began to quake for what was coming—your mother hearing it all—and would have laid down a fi-pun note to have

been well out of the place. However, as things stood, I was obliged to turn it off as well as I could, determining, in my own mind, if she said anything scandalous to deny it flatly and call her a vile impostor, just to satisfy Mrs. Widge. So I asked her boldly whether she could name any circumstance of that sort that might freshen my memory.

"The circumstances which occurred," says she, "that stormy night may not have been sufficiently strong, in your view, to have answered that end, for their consequence is far better known to myself than to you."

"Just then, Launcy, my boy, your mother called Mary, and rushed desperately into her chamber.

"Name it, ma'am, name it for evin's sake," says I, "for I am afraid this mystery is disturbing the tranquillity and happiness of my family."

"Impossible!" says she, "in the name of justice! I, sir, disturb the peace of your family? If you derive any pleasure from doing good, I come to secure your happiness, not to create one wave on the waters of your peace. My errand is one of mercy, of the very salvation of a valuable life. And I have selected you to perform it, if you will, because from the incident I was about to recall, if possible, to your recollection, and which subsequent events have perhaps made me lay greater stress upon than it merited, I thought your heart was good, and it might feel pleasure in reaping a deserved reward."

"That speech, Launcy, my boy," continued Gabriel, "made me astonished, and I concluded the lady must be at least the wife of a member of parliament. So I hoped no offence, hinted at my ignorance of what she was talking about, and its suspicious mystery, as an excuse, and again requested her to name the incident.

"It is simple enough. Do you recollect at about such a time, and on such a night as I have spoken of, standing after midnight at the door of this very house, when a woman with a child hurried up, and you bade her kindly take care of that child, and make haste home? To my heart, it was kindly said, and let us hope that Providence heard it as well as I, and took care of the shorn lamb, when care of mine became impossible. Can you recollect it, Mr. Widge?"

"I can, ma'am, now, sufficiently well," says I.

"Then, sir," says she, "I am that same woman! And for that same child as you then asked me to take care of, am I come now to ask you to do the same benevolent office; and as, at that most disastrous time I did to the utmost of your wish—so, I request you will now do as regards mine. What say you, sir?"

"Can't say, ma'am, really," says I, "the

fact is, I know no more now than I did before you told me all this. This child—though it must be a young man or a young 'ooman by now—"

"This child is now a young man, Mr. Widge," says she.

"But I know nothing about him," says I, "he is a perfect stranger to me, and, begging your pardon, so are you ma'am."

"Yes, truly," says she, "I am unknown to you, and must at present remain so. But the time is not far off when you will know more, and, perhaps, be surprised at the knowledge. In the meanwhile, you must trust wholly to my integrity, repose confidence in me, and all will be well. The young man in whom I would engage your interest, goes under the name of Hollis; he is an artist, but where he lives I do not know. Thus much I can tell you; the child you saw me carry that horrible night, was stolen from me shortly afterwards, and from that hour to a very recent period, he was as totally lost to me as though he were buried in his grave."

"Was he your own, ma'am," says I, "if it's a fair question? The lady hesitated," continued Mr. Widge, "and then said with a smile,

"The question is just enough in itself, but I think, sir, you will agree with me, that even a fair question cannot be answered with equal propriety at all times. But I may assure you of one thing—he was much better born than he seemed to be."

"And so are you, my lady," thinks I, though I did not say so.

"And now, Mr. Widge," says she, "having already stated why I came on this business to you in particular, I will give you another reason. Your son, Launcelot, is an artist like Mr. Hollis. I thought they might be acquainted. If so, what I wish to be done is the more easily and certainly effected. It will cost nothing, not even an hour's trouble—but it must be given with more authority than a mere letter—necessarily anonymous for the highest reasons—could have assumed; or otherwise I might have written without troubling you at all. If my suppositions are correct, will you undertake to have Mr. Hollis apprised of a simple fact, which, in case of compliance, I will communicate to you immediately."

"Why, ma'am," says I, "if there is no harm in it—"

"The injury and crime consists in keeping it a secret, sir," says she, "not in making it known."

"Well, even in that case, I don't see," says I, "how I can make any such promise. I know nothing about Mr. Hollis, no more, no nor not so much as you do, ma'am; and as to my son Launcy, I never heard him mention his name, much more call him his acquaintance."

"But I do know him, pa," exclaimed

Launcelet, "he is friend of mine—at least—a—I hope he will be. Upon my soul, I wish I had been in your place myself."

"And I wish I had been in yours, Launcy; so that is all the difference between us; for it revived in your mother's mind, in all its freshness and vigor, that unfortunate business down at Fosselthorpe there, about Widow Stiff, and made her think worse and worse of me, and herself so poorly, before I could get her to hear a word of explanation, that her late illness was the consequence, and I have this very day discharged a doctor's bill of seven pounds fifteen. But I'll finish my tale, such as it is, and then you may say what you think fit."

"Go to work, pa, please, as soon as you like."

"Hearing that," continued Gabriel, "the lady says—"

"You still seem to doubt me and my intentions, Mr. Widge; and of course, I can scarcely now attempt to offer additional appearances, and yet—yes—there is, perhaps, one that you would think a more certain security than my word, for the truth of what is said. Take this jewel, I beg, and keep it until the whole business is cleared up to your mind. It is worth five hundred pounds at least, but is worth much more than that to me. Take it, but keep it sacredly until the whole mystery is cleared up, the story finished, and then it becomes mine again. Your own respectability is my sufficient guarantee for your integrity on this point."

"That, my boy, was what she said; and I looked on it as rubbing my face with a horse-hair cloth, because I did not show the same confidence in her. I felt sure directly that she was some high lady in disguise; and forthwith assured her that I had no suspicions myself, only the tricks of the world were apt to make old tradesmen like me very cautious, perhaps a deal more so than they ought to be. 'But as to that vallyable,' said I, 'that yer ladyship holds in your hand, I flatly refuse it, under your favor—I don't desire any security of the kind.' But there she interrupted me—"

"Yes, sir," says she, "you must retain it awhile; I insist on compliance; it will better satisfy each of us."

"And with that, Launcy, my boy, she clapped into my hand an ornament set about with diamonds—Josey has seen it, and you know she is a judge, and says it is worth somewhere about four hundred and sixty, so there was no deception nor double faces in that matter. However that is neither here nor there. The lady then said, says she,

"Now, Mr. Widge, let me tell you what to do, and be assured that the doing it shall eventually afford you every satisfactory reflection that a good act produces. For a reason which may some time become apparent, I must

not and cannot be seen in this business. But the thing to be done is this: either by yourself or your son, let Mr. Hollis be searched out and seen; but your son would be the fittest person should he chance to have any acquaintance with him—a point not very improbable seeing they both are artists."

"In course I'm the properest person," interrupted Launcy, "we both are artists, and we happen to know one another, just as she suspected. Well what else, pa, for I see some importance in this affair now, which did not strike me before; what else did she say?"

"She said," resumed Gabriel, "she said this. Tell him that, on the authority of a lady, who knows more than she now can make known, and who had him in her arms very soon after he was born, his life is in danger from two persons whom he may mistake for friends. Tell him that *they who ask for the picture want the artist*. Bid him beware how, at any time, he may cross the Thames, because there is danger. And then tell him there is one behind the scenes who, when she has learnt all she can, will, if he prove to be whom he is supposed to be, clear the mystery of his birth and restore him to his title, his own, and his lady mother!"

"What a very extraordinary and romantic incident!" cried Launcelet, amazed; "his title, his own, his lady mother! what is his title I wonder? He is a lost baronet, or lord or something of the sort. And I am to communicate the news! We are getting into high society you see, pa, at a rapid rate than our modestly calculated on; and now you also see the impossibility of avoiding to get me out of all present difficulties. To see Mr. Hollis I must go out. To be able to go out I must have my debts paid. To have my debts paid is to be born again a gentleman! That mysterious lady might well tell you that you would reap your reward. There is no knowing what your reward may be. Lord Hollis will be my friend for life, of course he will, and perhaps, in the end, by his interest, help me to a knighthood myself. 'Pon my honor, take it all together, I never was so pleased in my life! If I have any enemies, let 'em come to me now, and I'll forgive 'em all!—But what else did she say, pa? Surely she said something else?"

"I feel uncommonly elevated myself," said Gabriel, disregarding his son's questions; "for though I got it soundly from Mrs. Widge, and had to pay the doctor to cure her, into the bargain, I begin to believe—"

"Did she say any thing more, pa, I asked you?"

"No, my boy, except 'good afternoon.' She did not even promise to come, again, or ask me to send to her instead."

"Then, pa, I see the course before us, as clear as Oxford-street. The sooner Lord Hol-

lie, or whatever his name may be, is informed of this mysterious revelation, the luckier for us and for him. My money matters must all be arranged to-morrow, at the very latest; so that the world may be once more 'mine hoister.' I shall want a new suit for the occasion, as I am in absolute rags at the present moment; and the tailor must be stimulated to produce it in two hours. Modern genius *can* achieve it, and it *must* be done. Mealy, my love; I begin to feel myself a man again. The misery that makes men mad, is passing off from me—evaporating like steam. But yet I feel that every instant which passes between now and the time when I shall again meet my dear friend Hollis, is an instant lost!"

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH MR. SANDHILL AND MR. HOLLIS ARE INTERRUPTED BY LAUNCELOT WIDGE BRINGING HIS NEWS.

"ON maturely considering the question in all its bearings," observed Mr. Sandhill to his young friend Mr. Hollis, after the latter had communicated to him such information respecting Saul and Thoroton, as Mr. Launcelot Widge had, at the interview recorded in a former chapter, supplied; "after weighing it point by point, and comparing one thing with another, I am decidedly of opinion that a more timely and fortunate circumstance could scarcely have been expected, than is this proposed portrait, by you, of the very man we now most wish to see. For the information given by this Mr. Widge, most effectually settles any question that might have arisen as to the identity of Saul with the man whom I overheard utter such strange language to Mr. Thoroton. He is the same person, beyond doubt. Though, even if any such doubt could have existed, it would have been set aside by the additional fact that Mr. Thoroton was himself the very individual through whom the proposition for the portrait was made. And though I would by all means have you accept the commission for the picture, as affording an excellent introduction, and ample opportunity also for correct observation, I yet half suspect that some sinister design *may* be disguised beneath this plausible pretext. Those two individuals plainly have been—if they are not now—banded together in some illegal and unholy combination, for purposes which shun the light of day, and the face of honesty. I *know* one of them to be a designing,

plotting, and ambitious man; ambitious, at least, of those distinctions,—such as worldly rank and pecuniary abundance,—which, when put in juxta-position with principle, with honor and honesty, a well-regulated mind would treat with aversion and contempt. The other, I can readily suppose to be of a similar stamp. Together, our more simple human natures can have no faith against whatever, of which man is capable, they might not attempt to do. Still, the power of the laws is so vastly great and comprehensive in this country, that, though we lose our confidence in men as individuals, we feel secure against great excesses in the almost certainty of detection, and the terrors of legal retribution."

At this moment a tap was heard at the door of the room,—which was an apartment of Mr. Hollis's house,—and a servant entered, and presented a card to the last-named gentleman. He glanced his eye over it, and, turning to Mr. Sandhill, said,—

"Mr. Launcelot Widge. The very young fellow I have been speaking to you about. Shall he be asked up?"

"Oh, by all means!" replied the barrister; "I should like to see him."

"Ask Mr. Widge up stairs," said Hollis, and the servant disappeared. Scarcely a minutely elapsed before Launcelot entered the apartment; and was formally introduced by Mr. Hollis to his friend and adviser, Mr. Sandhill.

It must be confessed that, when properly *tooled* at his toilette, Mr. Launcelot made a much better figure as a man, than as an artist. He was tall and well-formed, by no means ill-featured, and lacked not at all in that very essential commodity, personal assurance. When dressed, his perfect self-complacency became remarkable. But then he really did *look* well, and thus carried his excuse upon his own exterior. Like most other great men, he appeared greatest when seen through the mist outside, but lessened materially on closer acquaintance. On the occasion in question, however, Launcelot exerted all his efforts to appear as gentlemanlike as he possibly could.

"I should have made you a call before now, Mr. Hollis," said Widge, as he took his seat; "only circumstances beyond my own control prevented me, as they do many gentlemen besides me. But now I am come, I've brought you some great news."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hollis. "I shall be happy to hear it, especially if it be to your own advantage."

"No, no," rejoined Launcy, "I'm born to bad luck, and a wooden spoon in a por-

ringed. It is all about yourself; for, in fact, I have come on purpose to tell you that you are likely to be a baronet, or a lord, or something of that sort, with a large estate, before long."

Mr. Sandhill, who sat with his elbow resting upon an arm of his chair, and his chin slightly bearing between the forefinger and tip of the thumb, suddenly darted his eyes horizontally upon the speaker, and kept them fixed in that direction, but made no other sign that he particularly regarded what was said.

"I suppose I may speak before your friend?" asked Launcy, in a lower tone.

"Oh, yes, most certainly! He is the very gentleman before whom I would wish you to say any thing and every thing that concerns me."

"Thank you—quite right," observed Widge, in his usual lively manner; "then just listen attentively, please, because the lady who let it all out told my pa that it was of first-rate importance."

And here Mr. Widge, junior, gave, without a single interruption from either of his auditors, a circumstantial, and, in many cases, literally verbal report of all with which the reader was made acquainted in the last preceding chapter.

"Do favor us, sir," observed Mr. Sandhill, calmly addressing Launcelot; "with a repetition of the last command which this lady is said to have given."

"With pleasure, sir," he replied. "As nearly as I and pa can recollect, she said, 'Tell him on the authority of a lady who knows more than she dares make known, and who had him in her arms soon after he was born, that his life is in danger from two persons that he thinks friends. Tell him that they want the artist and not the picture, and he must be careful in crossing the Thames, because them wherries are dangerous.' And, lastly, she said, 'Tell him there is one behind the scenes; I suppose she meant herself, in course; who will learn all she can, and clear up the mystery of his birth, and restore him to his title, his own, and the lady his mother.'"

Though, throughout this relation, Mr. Hollis had observed a profound silence, it had not passed the observant eye of the attorney, that his emotions had been gradually rising into strength—a fact, intimated to the ear, also, by occasional spasmodic catchings of the breath, the sure prelude to that silent gathering in the deep recesses of the heart and brain, which eventually terminates in open sorrow. When the strange narrative was concluded, the eyes of Mr. Sandhill and Mr. Hollis met, and were fixed an instant or two upon each

other. He burst into a flood of tears. This incident was so little understood, and so strikingly unexpected by Mr. Launcelot Widge, that he seemed, for some moments, to be absolutely petrified on the spot.

"Come, come, Mr. Hollis," said the attorney, rising, "you had better retire a few moments. Mr. Widge, excuse us a short time."

And he led Hollis from the room, as Launcy found just tongue enough to exclaim,

"Certainly, sir, with the greatest —" But there he stopped short, as he suddenly reflected that to say, "with the greatest pleasure," would be to infer very plainly that he was glad to get rid of them. At the same instant the door closed again, and Mr. Widge was left to contemplate, as he mentally expressed it, "the great hole he had so very nearly made in his manners." And, indeed, so he had; since it may here be said, for the especial benefit of all assuming and ignorant people, that when "good manners" are put on only like a Sunday suit, instead of being worn generally, they are in almost inevitable danger of being spoiled. Just by the same rule—which everybody must have remarked to be pretty universal among certain classes of society—that the best and most carefully regarded garments are sure to get more soiled than if they had been "one's everyday things." The philosophy of this perverseness in nature may be too profound to be thoroughly investigated, but the accuracy of the results will not admit of a question.

"Mr. Sandhill," said Hollis, as the two entered another apartment, "I feel literally overcome with this strange accumulation of unaccountable events—it seems almost more than merely natural."

"Not at all—not in the least so! Only under your present necessarily excited state of mind, you feel prone to entertain superstitious feelings and imagine agencies which have but, at best, a doubtful existence. Besides, to yield thus, at the remote prospect of a *dénouement* which may never come, is very contrary to the ordinary philosophy of men, who, under circumstances similar to yours, would, in general, launch out into the opposite extravagance, and create a world of delight, without knowing whether or not they had air to swing it in when created. These things are odd enough, to be sure, but nothing more."

"Does not the singular statement we have just heard alter your opinion, sir, as to the course to be pursued?"

"If it be true—perhaps so;—very possibly. But inquiry is necessary, and we must

take time to consider. • Dismiss the subject from your mind as much as possible for the present, and pray endeavor to calm yourself. I will leave you for a short period and return to Mr. Widge, since there are a few questions which I am desirous of putting to him. What an owl in parrot's feathers the creature is!"

And Mr. Sandhill and Launcelet were soon again seated together.

"And so, Mr. Widge," began the attorney, "some unknown lady related this gypsy's fortune-telling tale to your respectable father?"

"Yes, sir,—but I did not hear him say she looked like a gypsy."

"Why no—probably not; but it would not be the only instance on record in which appearances very much deceive. What, now, is your own impression of the story—do you see any particular meaning in it?"

"I flatter myself I see a good deal in it," answered Launcy; "for any one man can see as far into a stone wall as any other."

"Indisputably. But as your opinion might materially help to enlighten us, I should feel flattered by its communication. What may you consider are its allusions?"

"Well, sir," said Launcelet, "though I say I can see a good deal in it, yet it is a good deal of that sort which I don't know exactly how to explain. I fancy this lady in the background, though she is a good deal in deep shadow, knows, as she says, a good deal more than—than—she says she does. But the main point is, these two men that threaten Mr. Hollis's life. Now when I come to consider, sir, that old Turkey Rhu—I mean Saul le Blanc, has given him a commission for a picture, when we know that he lives on the other side of the river, that *she* says they want the painter and not the picture, and warns him not to cross the water, when we come to consider—a—I know what I want to say, but I can't hit on the right words, somehow."

"Ay—yes—but I understand you. It is your opinion that Saul is one of those two persons."

"Exactly! You've hit the right nail on the head in a moment. I believe he is one of them; for I know him to be an old rascal; but who the other is, unless it be his daughter, I cannot tell."

"He has a daughter, then?"

"To be sure he has, and a fine woman she is—just the one I should like for a model, but she's as proud as Lucifer; and when she sat to me for her portrait, was covered almost up to her chin. I ventured to hint in a delicate way how many fashionable and high ladies—at least who consider themselves so—like to have *their* portraits

painted; but she bridled up like a tiger, her olive complexion flushed like summer on a russet apple, and I felt half annihilated by the glance of her eyes. So I sharply hid myself behind my canvass, and fiddled away at my background. I heard her get up and sweep off like the rush of a wind; and my sittings were forever finished, though the picture was not. But 'pon my honor, it was the finest bit of study of a woman that I ever saw—it was worth any thing."

Mr. Sandhill smiled, as he again asked,

"Then your father knows neither this strange lady's name, nor her address, nor, in short, any thing whatever of her personally?"

"Nothing at all," answered Launcelet; "no more than he knows what is at the bottom of the Thames."

"Does his description of her at all meet your ideas of Saul's daughter, whom you have just been speaking about?"

"Ah! now you mention it, I think it does. He said she was a fine figure, and so *she* is. But then, that don't amount to much, for the same may be said of thousands besides."

"Then you think this lady cannot be the same?"

"Very unlikely—very. Madam Agatha lives with her father; she is all the world in his eyes; he dotes upon her more than on his own life; and she regards him much in the same manner. I know this, because I have been with them often, and seen it. In fact, I never knew father and daughter more attached. It seems to me, then, that if Saul is the man who meditates this mischief, Agatha is the last person in the world to warn any body against him. From what that lady said to pa, it might bring him to the gallows. But I am sure, sir, if you had seen as much of Madam Agatha as I have, you would say she has spirit enough much sooner to kill herself than be the death of her father. The last sitting business would have settled the point to any man's satisfaction."

Mr. Sandhill appeared lost in thought during a few moments, and then added, as he gently rose from his chair,

"I thank you, Mr. Widge, in the name of Mr. Hollis, for your excessive kindness. Every attention shall be paid to your information which it deserves; and—perhaps in case of any further little service being required, you would not think it too much trouble—"

"Oh! don't mention it—no trouble at all, sir,—a pleasure—a decided pleasure," said Launcy.

"If we drop you a line at any time—"

"Quite enough, sir; you will find me ready."

Mr. Sandhill rang the bell, and bowed Mr. Launcelot Widge out of the room. He then returned to Mr. Hollis. A long conversation ensued between them, concerning this most material change in the aspect of affairs; for, whatever might have been Mr. Sandhill's manner of treating the subject before Launcelot, both he, and the young man so deeply interested in this discovery, felt more seriously impressed with the vast importance of this new and extraordinary, as well as unexpected, evidence, than either, at that moment, deemed proper to make known before the messenger who brought it.

Launcelot himself, however, was not half so well satisfied. According to the code of politeness which he had studied, he had been treated remarkably ill; and, no sooner had he reached the street, than he vented a low imprecation upon "their shabbiness;" called a cab, with an expression of severity that awed the driver, and returned furiously home, impatient to declare to his wife how "they had not even had the decency to ask him to a glass of wine, much more to a champagne supper, which was the least he had expected;" and to express his firm conviction, that at the moment people began to fancy they had a chance of rising in the world they forgot all decency, and did not care how they behaved to the very best friends they had.

"But this I can tell my lord," concluded Launcy, "whether he is going to be a nobleman or a plain knight, I consider myself quite as good as him, if not a trifle or two better. No man shall keep his corks undrawn against me, with impunity; and especially in a case like this. If they send twenty notes, Mealy, I'm determined I'll never go again. But that is how it always is. Do but run after people about their own business, and I'll bet ten to one against their thanking you for your trouble. Perhaps they may in words, because words cost nothing. But if you have to wait for a glass or two of wine till they invite you, you may stand till you crumble into dust, and get blown away by the next wind as whistles round the corner."

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. THOROTON GROWS THOUGHTFUL, AND DISCOURSES WITH HIS WIFE UPON AN UNEXPECTED AND CURIOUS SUBJECT — A CATASTROPHE.

WE must now beg the reader to accompany us, for a short time, to the house on the right of the Hampstead-road, occupied by Walter Thoroton.

Dirty, desolate, and dreary, its exterior exhibited all those marks of neglect and abandonment, which almost always bespeaks a house long untenanted, almost unowned, and as though destined never to be tenanted again. It looked as looks the web of some solitary spider, spun long ago, in a sunny hour of happiness, and industry, and hope, but now buried in dust, and borne down by the weight of its own impending ruin. Yet the scanty and thin smoke which now and then arose from its chimney-stacks, seemed to say, though faintly and sadly, that life was still to be found within its walls, although the happiest of the household gods had long since departed from its hearthstones.

And truly, life—human life—that little gulf into which are poured so many streams of susceptibility, and suffering, and pain, *was* there, though it was life that too well agreed with the fallen and disastrous character of all outside. Within those walls dwelt heartlessness, stony heartlessness, and hypocrisy, in their most painful of all shapes, that of a woman and a sister. And there also cowered, in the form of a man, burning but disappointed ambition, pride, hatred and resentment.

It was night, or nearly so. The shadow of darkness had descended deeply, though not yet darkness itself. A thick sleety rain pattered sharply against the windows, trickled down the panes like tears, and found its way through at the bottom of the casements, where it stood in little pools of cold and dirty water. Still, sufficient light was left by which the eye, accustomed to it, might have discerned a man, Mr. Walter Thoroton, sitting gloomily before a warm but blazeless fire, silent and motionless as the furniture that surrounded him. Near him also sat Mrs. Clarice Thoroton, his wife; and, by her whole expression of equally downcast feelings, plainly betraying the mute unhappiness which comes of deeds done that will not bear being thought upon; of actions without virtue, and a present state of doubt and irresolution, unenlivened save by the last red evening glimmer of that hope which is hastening to its final extinction.

They had recently heard, by some means which it is not now worth our while to inquire into, that the information obtained by the Lady Lavinia respecting her son, daily tended to strengthen and confirm the impression that he was still alive, and would certainly prove eventually to be the individual they had previously been led to suppose: while the total neglect of that lady, for a long time past, to pay her accustomed visits, or even to accept their direct invitations, clearly showed that the gulf had now begun to open which should henceforth stand between them, an impassable pit of separation. Ruin was upon them, and the great chance of redemption for which they had cast so much of wealth and character into the lottery of crime, was about to prove a total blank. Here indeed was more than enough for moody silence and sad thinking; though even this was not all that disturbed the uneasy breast of Mr. Thoroton, for, notwithstanding his resolute and haughty general character, times were when, in spite of himself, his spirits flagged, his heart failed of its desperate determinations, and his mind became so overborne by melancholy presentiments, that the future presented to his contemplation only shadowy visions of misery,—of successless battling against adverse and predetermined fates,—of struggles ending only in the vanity of their own labour,—of progressive sinkings from stage to stage in the scale of social life, until alone the death of destitution loomed horribly upon the dark horizon, to close this terrifying scene.

After the passion and excitement, which led to the events consequent upon his last interview with Saul, had subsided, and left leisure for calmer thinking,—sentiments similar to those above described very frequently came unbidden into his mind, and refusing to be driven easily away, made his life miserable, and his conduct gloomy and strange. Such was the case on the night, and at the time of which we are speaking.

"What are you thinking about, Thoroton?" said Clarice. "Always silent, always melancholy;—with not a word to exchange with me upon any subject! My life becomes miserable to me—"

"And so does mine to me, Heaven knows!" exclaimed he, hastily interrupting her.

"But why so? Why not at once determine upon some plain course, and pursue it, so as to free us from this unbroken anxiety and continual fear?"

"You ask me what it is I am thinking about. I will tell you, if you wish to

know;—if not, I can keep my thoughts in the living hell where they are hatched."

"This is strange talk, Walter, and unfit to be used before me. What is it that so distresses you?"

"I was thinking, Clarice, and the thought has frequently recurred to me of late, that there are—that is, there *may be*, certain conditions upon which a feeling and thinking man might naturally and excusably consider his life not worth retaining any longer. To men in general, life upon any terms is valuable; it is every thing. They regard death as an enemy, and would rather wade through any amount of common misery, than surrender themselves voluntarily to the custody of that universal gaoler who, to-day or to-morrow, this year or the year after, is sure to shut them within his walls. But, for myself, I confess I do not look upon these matters in that light. So far from being an enemy, death is our best friend in extreme distresses;—a ready escape from poverty and disgrace, the very contemplation of which is frightful."

"But why occupy your mind with such wretched as well as evil contemplations? Our poverty can surely never become so great, nor our fall so low."

"Poverty is altogether comparative," said Thoroton, interrupting her, "and is to be measured only according to habits and ideas. While the endurances attending it are keen, or otherwise, in proportion to the mind and the sensibility we bring to them. Practically, it is a very false philosophy which presumes that what millions bear, any man may be brought to bear in like manner. Harsh custom and deadened faculties,—habitually debased sensibilities, and minds that harbour scarcely one thought above the means of gratifying the brute;—these indeed reconcile men to any thing, so it be but life, rather than to that lasting release which is only to be had without life. But to change the habit of comfort into want,—a previous existence of respectability into degradation,—to harrow one's sensitive nature amidst the unavoidable associations of vice, and bring down an educated and susceptible mind to commingle with the coarsest, most vulgar, the very demons of humanity,—to be bodily and mentally amongst them, with them, a part of them,—and to say that such a life to such a man is worth retaining! Fough! I would not have it for any immortality. No, Clarice. Every kind of possession may be held upon too high a tenure, and life is but a brief possession at best."

"This is a melancholy subject, and I do not see what end is to be attained by dis-

-cussing it," remarked Mrs. Thoroton; "but you appear to think only of the present and nothing of the future."

"You mistake me," said Thoroton. "I think much of the future. I was only saying that mere life itself may become worth nothing even in this world; but the future—the future may be every thing. Indeed, take the world of suffering through and you shall find that. *There's* the respect that makes calamity of so long a life. Even with him who commits suicide, it is not because he clings to life, but because he avoids the future that makes him live as long as he does."

"And is not that a proof of criminality, that natural distrust of the future?"

"It is a proof of doubt, of mental uncertainty, and that such a man worships an 'Unknown God.' Nothing more. And yet such a man it has now become the fashion to call a coward. As though he, who has the courage to meet his own death—to foresee it, to study it, to achieve it, has not courage to meet a far less important thing. Is a man a coward because of two evils he does not choose that which to him appears the greatest? That would indeed be to admit a most monstrous misapplication of terms, for cowardice, surely, is never more shown than in suffering perpetually, while the certainty of escape is before us, if we dare the attempt. But the fact is, I presume such a man to institute a comparison between the unconquerable miseries of his life, and that life itself. He finds the former materially preponderates, and accordingly gives up the latter. He treats the question only as a balance of evils—the sufferings of life against annihilation. Now, every paltry witting who cannot display his courage in any other manner, fancies he can show it by denouncing suicide. Such a fellow—and there are thousands of the same breed, would rather live the life of a worm, than cut off twenty days of his natural existence."

"But, surely, that man is a coward who runs away from the evils of time by rushing into eternity?"

"No more of a coward than is any other man who seeks to avoid all the evil and misery he can. This is what every body does every day of their lives; yet the popular philosophy, which is ever framed to flatter its own advocates, never considers this as cowardice."

"Such a man shows that he dare not encounter the prospective difficulties of life, and has not heart to sustain such as already press upon him."

"An ungenerous and gratuitous assump-

tion altogether. Say he *will* not encounter those difficulties, not that he 'dares' not; since he dares to meet whatever is universally held to be a much more fearful thing. You may impugn the soundness of his conclusions, but to impeach his courage, is ridiculous."

"Are we not taught to believe that, in order to avoid a less danger, he throws himself upon a greater?"

"If so," replied Thoroton, "your belief involves a direct contradiction. First, it is admitted that he dares not face his difficulties, and consequently is a coward; and then it is again admitted that of two dangers he chooses the most perilous, which is an act the very opposite of cowardice. He can be no coward, who volunteers death in any shape, and the application of such a term in such a case, is only made by the superficial and weak. It cannot be upon slight and frivolous considerations that a sane individual should throw away his existence. And if suicide required only a given amount of cowardice in order to its accomplishment, I have such an opinion of mankind in general as to believe—did no other motives restrain them—that the act would soon become prodigiously common. And in a country like this, where the difficulties of living out of misery are, to thousands, insuperable, it would become the more especially so."

"But as great a sin as suicide is against God, is it not also considered a crime against the laws?"

"It is," answered Mr. Thoroton; "and most absurdly and ridiculously so. In general, no body can value a man's life at a higher rate than he values it himself. Few are the instances, indeed, in which any body else estimates it as highly. But *for himself*, I think we may admit that a man better knows the value of it, than any other person can know it for him. Now, if an individual be in a sane state of mind, and should by circumstances and reflection be brought to the conclusion, that his life—having ceased to yield either profit or pleasure sufficient to balance its sufferings and and evils—is no longer answering the purpose of nature, and therefore had better be got rid of; what justice or policy is there in the law that steps before him and says he shall still continue in his purgatory, until, in the course of nature, like an acorn falling to the ground, he drops out of it? If, I say, he be in a sane condition, why propose to punish him? For though it is declared unlawful for a man to attempt to take away his own life, yet it is also declared lawful to take his life away from

him.* In other words, the law declares itself to have more power over a man's peculiar own, than he himself has. Thus sinking the protected in the protection, and making of man the most perfect slave that the human mind can conceive. For if a man's life be not peculiarly, especially, and essentially his own, what under heaven is? And, on the other hand, if an attempted suicide be considered *not* sane, what a monstrous piece of cruelty and legalised crime it is, to inflict punishment for an act of which the perpetrator is not cognizant? I know it may be alleged that an individual, as a member of society, has no right to deprive that society of his services. Perhaps he finds his services no longer either required by others, or conducive to the means of his own proper subsistence. He may happen to know, and feel, that the world can do quite as well without him, as he without the world, and in that case the objection amounts to nothing. Besides, when society rewards its unfortunate members so ill that any one of them is driven to the thoughts of suicide as the only refuge left him, obligations are mutually at an end, and the man must feel that he stands—as far as himself is concerned—entirely free and alone. All obligations must be essentially mutual, if they exist at all. Even gratitude itself ceases, when the object of it no longer appreciates the feeling. I think these matters lie altogether between God and a man's own self—not between man and his fellow-man."

"What can you mean by all this, Thornton?"

"The moral of it, Clarice, is this.—Some men make their defences before they are charged with a crime, and some talk a great deal about what they never intend to perform; by precisely the same rule as others often *do* what they never even speak about."

"These are all enigmas to me," replied the lady.

"But time leaves few things unexplained, sooner or later," rejoined her husband, "and if a man can but remain fixed and steady in a foregone conclusion, he may defy misfortune to bring him much lower than he himself consents to go. We nourish in general, too much pride; and thus the fluctuations of fortune become our masters. It is this feeling which makes the prospect of sinking into poverty and contempt so unendurable. Nothing that such a life has to offer, can make, to some men, the shadow of a compensation for the mortifications and mental anguish it inevitably entails. To be *looked at* by those who once bowed to

us, to become a stranger in the eyes of our former acquaintance, to be made eternally to feel that—the wealth being gone—all consideration is fled, and the man himself sunk into a living nothing. These things, which the bitter, hollow world, invariably teaches the fallen, make many a man a villain, and precipitate many crimes. Who can foretell, for instance, what may yet become of *me*?—What I may not do, and what not be called upon to suffer?"

"And all for the want of one resolute and virtuous determination to abandon this desperate pursuit, now it has plainly become hopeless. For my own part, I can see no better plan than frankly to acknowledge the whole affair to my sister—to do our best towards making reparation for the past, and throw ourselves at once upon her mercy for forgiveness."

"Never, by Heaven!" exclaimed Thornton, "I'll risk the gallows rather! That would, indeed be adding folly and madness to—But, Clarice! what noise is that? There are people on the stairs, in the dark!"

And Mr. Thornton sprang to his feet, with a peculiarity of action which betrayed some latent idea of defending himself. Defending himself against what, or whom? or why should he defend himself at all? Yet, thus unconsciously does the temper of the mind instantaneously diffuse itself over the body, making him who thinks evil, feel sudden fear; as they who read in loneliness and by night of spectres, start convulsively at every sound.

There was no light in the room, but that flashy, uncertain and reddish one created by the fire; but it sufficed to display sufficiently clear to Mr. Thornton's view, as the door was unceremoniously opened, the figures of four men; the two foremost of whom could readily be recognised as Mr. Sandhill and Mr. Hollis. Thornton was about to address them, when a word or two passed between them and their companions; upon the utterance of which, the latter advanced to the table on the other side of which Mr Thornton stood, and the words,

"Mr. Thornton, you are our prisoner!" were distinctly heard.

"No!" he exclaimed, snatching open a drawer of the table before him, "I am no man's prisoner!"

At the same moment a sharp click, and a loud report, succeeded, one the other, with the rapidity of lightning, and Thornton's body fell ponderously upon the carpet. The philosophy of suicide was verified!

The scene that ensued may so easily be

imagined, that it were needless to describe it farther, than simply by stating that Mrs. Thoroton shrieked once and loudly—one dire wail of human agony and fright—and fell beside her husband. The servants rushed in with lights, and in the midst of fright and confusion, the body of the unhappy Thoroton was raised from the floor. His pistol had taken effect upon the right side of his face, having fractured the jaw, torn the cheek to pieces, and laid bare the temples. The brain did not appear to be injured, but the right eye was irretrievably lost. He yet had life in him; and by Mr. Sandhill's orders, was immediately carried down stairs, supported in a couch, and driven away direct to the nearest hospital.

"A dreadful and most unexpected catastrophe!" said the attorney to Mr. Hollis, as the sound of the carriage wheels died along the street; "but what human foresight could have guarded against such an improbability, or shall be blamed for not having anticipated an act resulting from either the most perverted reasoning or a temporary delirium?"

"It is truly horrible," replied Hollis, "and if it could but have been foreseen that the object in view was only to be gained by precipitating scenes of blood and terror like this, better, far better would it have been that I should have remained unknown—lost in the obscurity wherein I have grown up from a child, to the last days of my existence! This will be frightful and bitter news to the lady of Woodhouselee."

"Yet, my conscience," interrupted Mr. Sandhill, "acquits me of any crime in this matter—error, there may have been, for all men are liable to it at all times. But the course of proceeding which has been the immediate cause of this distressing occurrence, I designed upon mature consideration, and for the best of all purposes. This feigned arrest—for you know it *was* feigned—appeared likely to force that plain confession which was required, and which nothing else perhaps, would have extorted; suicide!—self sacrifice!—a man's own blood upon the floor of his own home!—What creature on earth, be his knowledge of human nature what it may, could for an instant have supposed it possible in a case like this?"

"It is very true," replied Hollis, "that, much as we know of human nature, much more remains inexplicable and unknown. Every man is conscious of the processes of his own mind and feelings—he knows by what strange inward courses he arrives at such and such conclusions; but when he

attempts to apply the same principles in explanation of the conclusions and acts of other men, he often finds himself baffled and defeated. Individual natures differ so much, and the views which men take of things are regulated by such contrary and opposite processes of thought, colored doubtless by the peculiar quality and kind of their respective knowledges, that though one man finds it impossible rationally to account for the conclusions to which another may arrive, we are bound to believe that the other man no more lacked sufficient reasons of his own, than we do ourselves."

"That is sound reasoning, Mr. Hollis," said the attorney, "and happy would it be for the liberal spirit of mankind, could all be brought to think of each other's motives with so much Christian charity and good feeling. Then would the ignorant odium which is now cast upon the decidedly (in one form or other) most miserable class of our fellow men, the class of suicides, be turned into pity and sorrow. I was almost about to say that we ought to sit in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting that by any means, whatever they be, such calamities should ever befall human beings like ourselves. But the iron-heartedness which, in such cases, rather inclines to punish than pity, is worthy only of a demon whose delight increases with the greater depths of human misery. Lawyer as I am, Mr. Hollis, and necessarily, perhaps, too much warped in my individual views by my profession, I still think that the magistrate who can rudely insult the hopeless wretchedness of an attempted suicide—throw coldly and devilishly, his insanity in his face, and tell him that he is sentenced to prison, and hopes he will afterwards suffer transportation, deserves—not merely to be dismissed from the bench, but—if the *moral law* could but take the place of the statute law, be himself subjected to sufferings and privations calculated to drive him to the positive and final commission of the same act!"

"The contemplations that crowd upon my mind, Mr. Sandhill," said Hollis, "are painful to an extreme. Let us talk no more upon this subject, and, above all things, let the event of to-night teach us to be less liberal of our own thoughts and proceedings, and more considerate of those of others. That man, Saul, has yet to be dealt with. Heaven grant that there may be no more blood—no desperation—no suicide, no murder! Shall we go to Bermondsey to-night?"

"I intended so doing, but after what has happened——"

"Better, perhaps, defer the visit."

"Well—n—no—no! I think not. It is yet early in the evening; Mr. Thoroton is as well disposed of as possible—his lady is much recovered from the shock she has received, and, perhaps the earlier we can rid ourselves of this painful business the better."

"Be it as you please," answered Hollis, "though I think it very possible that if Mrs. Thoroton is in a condition to be conversed with, she is more likely, in her present state of feeling to discover the truth, than at another time, when caution has resumed its control over her mind."

"Possibly—very possibly so. The suggestion is well-timed, and worthy of being acted upon. Suppose then, that I remain a short time with Mrs. Thoroton, and you proceed to Mr. le Blanc's alone? I think you will be better alone? You may see his daughter; and if she be the lady Mr. Widge mentioned, your being unaccompanied will facilitate any communication she may feel inclined to make to you."

"Very well," answered the young artist, "I have no fear of his offering personal violence."

"You are legally empowered to defend yourself in such a case, and have the means in your hands of so doing. But I do not now anticipate any thing of the kind. Tell him at once of the act which Mr. Thoroton has committed, and he will see that the conspiracy is at an end."

The two individuals who accompanied them were then dismissed. Mr. Sandhill remained to have an interview with Mrs. Thoroton, and Mr. Hollis proceeded in a coach to Bermondsey.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE HISTORY OF AGATHA LE BLANC AND HER STUDENT LOVER—CHANGE—DESPAIR—AND CHANGE AGAIN.

EVER since that fatal hour when Agatha chanced to over-hear the horrifying and dreadful conversation which passed between Mr. Thoroton and her father respecting the future disposal of Mr. Hollis, her life had been but a continuance of mental agony and conflict. With the suddenness even of assassination itself, and with no less of its heart-horror and pain, she had unwittingly been led into the knowledge that her only surviving parent was, by his own avowal, capable of conniving at the violent death of a fellow creature, if not of perpetrating it with his own hand.

The effect which this discovery had upon her was almost indescribable. At once to find out that the father whom she revered with the most devoted affection might be a murderer, was indeed terrible.

That awful night she passed wholly in tears and prayer, upon her knees, rising only from her prostrate condition with the first beams of the morning sun, which, to her agitated religious spirit, seemed as they fell through the casement of her room, the visible assurance of the Almighty that the darkness of sin should yet be swept away, and be superseded by the glory of virtue, and the light of justice and truth.

Agatha was a sincere and enthusiastic Catholic. Her God was, in very deed and truth, her God. The world never found footing to step between Him and her soul, to supplant the infinite and eternal truth, or to divide with it the honors of possession. And yet, under the cloak of that religion had she, when innocently young, and unsuspecting, been made to suffer the deepest and most bitter degradation, the most total wreck of heart and hope, of which the lot of unfortunate woman, in this uncertain state, is susceptible. For less cause would thousands have forsaken their religion, and gone over to what might then have seemed to them a purer and a better faith. But the steadfastness and high intellect of Agatha saved her from the weakness of impeaching a mighty institution because of the deadly defection of one of its members; and she only became the more devout, as she found the hollowness and deception, the selfishness and baseness, of mere mortal natures.

"Hypocrisy and falsehood," she thought, "existed under all forms and in all places; they ruin individuals, and darken to many souls the eternal heavens to which we look for everlasting salvation. But if human crimes committed contrary to religion, though in the awful semblance of its sacred name, are to be pleaded as against religion itself, whither shall we fly for dependence and security? No;—for though all that frail humanity touches is mingled with corruption and error—though falsehood takes the guise of truth, and wickedness clothes itself in the robe of goodness, yet Truth itself, high above moral contagion, remains unspotted and all-pure; and Goodness, unsullied by the vices of her pretended devotees, only sorrows over, but suffers no impeachment from the blind and daring depravity of man."

Such were Agatha's reflections upon that story of early sorrow and shame which had wrought so much of ruin for herself

that the world had become a blank to her thenceforward to the end; and a life of repentance and atonement alone appeared to offer the way which she must seek for eternal pardon and salvation.

While Agatha le Blanc was yet scarcely more than sixteen, her personal beauty had become so remarkable as to attract almost general admiration. At that time she was residing in the house of a lady, of the same religious persuasion, situated within the manor of Woodhouselee, for the purpose of receiving her education; her father—who felt the deepest solicitude on that account—having placed Agatha under the care of Madame Crerar, whose ability and piety were well known some years before.

Madame Crerar was upon terms of strict friendship with Sir Stephen Woodhouselee and the Lady Lavinia, then recently married, and residing in the old house of the manor, where the hospitable forefathers of the race had lived and died in honor during the space of several hundred years. The offices of religious duty and friendship which mutually passed between Madame Crerar and her distinguished acquaintance afforded ample opportunities also for the formation of a friendship between the Lady Lavinia and Madame Crerar's beautiful young pupil, Agatha le Blanc. Indeed, the former was soon confessedly charmed at once with the person, the manners, and the wit of the pretty girl of sixteen, while the latter evinced in return for this amiable condescension, a degree of grateful devotion, as beautiful in its purity and strength as it was charming in its development.

To the manor-house of Woodhouselee Agatha was often invited;—a welcome guest beneath a roof which seldom heard aught but welcomes pass between its owners and all who presented themselves at the gate.

Amongst the frequent visitors who at that time enjoyed the friendship of the late Sir Stephen, was a young man named Forrest, the son of a wealthy neighbouring gentleman, who was then pursuing the studies necessary to fit him for the station to which apparently he was born, though without any immediate direction in the way of a particular profession. The young gentleman soon conceived an ardent and sincere attachment to Miss le Blanc, governed by the natural integrity of unsophisticated youth, and such a high sense of honor, as appeared to secure beyond the thought of impeachment, or the possibility of doubt, a happy termination.

Indeed, so little of the ordinary false and

temporary passion of the young was observable in the respectful affection which Mr. Forrest displayed, so totally absent were all appearances of hypocrisy and deception in his conduct towards Agatha, that it was not without feelings of secret satisfaction that the Lady Lavinia herself observed the growth of a love which promised, for a girl in whom she felt considerable interest, a future life of competent ease and domestic happiness. At the same time, and in order to prevent the growth of a too-strongly rooted affection which, when too late for Agatha's peace of mind, might be met by insurmountable objections from Mr. Forrest's father, she caused Sir Stephen to communicate to that gentleman the fact that his son was forming the connexion of which we have spoken. Mr. Forrest was a man of comprehensive mind, and most liberal feeling. He heard the intelligence with seriousness and calmness, and then replied,—

“In matters of this kind, Sir Stephen, which you and I know to be of the highest earthly importance to the parties immediately concerned, I shall never attempt in any shape to control any children of mine. To advise them, is at once my duty and my highest pleasure: but to them alone, whose nature it is to act the spiritual as well as the bodily tyrant, over their own flesh and blood, do I leave the exercise of that power which presumes to say aye, or no, to the disposal of the affections of the heart. Sir—these things are too deep, too immediately from Heaven and Heaven's hand-maid, Nature, to be slightly treated, or contradicted by us, from motives, whether of mere worldly interest or individual dislike. Were I to consult the interest of the purse, rather than that of a thinking and feeling being, I might wish that my son had fixed his choice in some more distinguished and wealthy quarter: but to feel, as I do, that the heart, and not the pocket, goes first, is to know that such a wish would—if carried out—prove both sinful and mischievous; and ought therefore, never to be entertained. Robert must please himself; and, in so doing may reap a good harvest of future and permanent satisfaction!”

The Lady Lavinia herself also mentioned the same subject, though with a bias of feeling evidently favorable to the young couple, to Madame Crerar. The latter received the news with an expression of consternation which, had it taken place before Agatha herself, might reasonably have led that young lady to suppose she was guilty of some indescribable crime. But, qualify-

ing her feelings with certain prudent thoughts of her own position, she observed very cautiously,

"I think, my lady, it would be better that I knew nothing whatever about the matter. Let me be considered to remain in ignorance—altogether in ignorance of this affair. Miss Agatha was sent to me to be instructed in sound knowledge and accomplishments—not to be taught, madam, the art of love."

And Madame Crerar forced an artificial laugh at the matter, which she dared not meet in sober earnestness.

Thus supported, or, rather, not opposed, Robert Forrest and Agatha le Blanc became at length confirmed and devoted lovers. Together they trod the same path by day, mingled their admiration of the same flowers, and wondered in the same extacy of thought at the countless glories of nature through the medium of the same faith. Apart they gazed upon the same stars by night, watched the same moon in her course through the heavens, but found the extreme of happiness only in the reflection that, though their eyes met not those of each other, they were at the self-same moment fixed upon the same external object. Such was their love; and such is the natural language of love under all circumstances, and in every part of the habited world.

But the time at last arrived when Robert Forrest had to return to college and his studies. It was a hard trial, the parting; it cost many tears, and called forth many protestations on his part of affection unalterable, of love more powerful than death, and constancy as incapable of ruin as is the earth of wandering from its path amongst the spheres.

Agatha listened, wept, and believed. The oaths of all mankind could not have shaken her confidence, or forced the slightest doubt upon her trusting mind.

But mark what followed! And see how soon the bright palaces of hope and heart-truth are shattered!

At first he wrote to her, letters that were all delight—words of the heart alone, which showed that a paradise on earth, nothing less, was opening before him. Months slipped away, and the letters became less frequent and more brief. The closeness of study hindered writing, though it wrought no change in him. But there *was* a change, and Agatha felt it, though without being able to describe to herself how and why. She was lost in the wilderness, and began to know that her feet were wandering amongst briars. She caught glimpses of the serpent gliding under her bed of roses.

The bright vision was growing dim! And then twilight came over her little world; and in the midst of this darkness the thunder-clap came, and the bolt fell. It was this. Robert Forrest wrote to Agatha a long, very long, letter. It looked, on the face of it, more like a criminal's defence than a letter; and Agatha trembled and turned pale even as she opened it.

And then poor Agatha raised her eyes from this cruel paper, and with a long-drawn sob that spoke of a breaking heart, fell insensible where she stood. It was in her own chamber, and no one heard the noise of her fall. When she came to herself again, she was sitting on the floor accidentally supported by a couch. Her opening eyes fell upon that dreadful paper which lay spread out upon her lap. She faintly shrieked at the momentary sight of it; but she was disturbed by the voice of Madame Crerar.

"What! praying for the welfare of thy lover?" cried Madame Crerar.

"All souls need prayer, dear madam: but especially those that the Almighty wisdom permits to be afflicted with madness."

"What paper is this, my child, beside you?"

"Pray take it up, madam, for I shall never touch it more, and read it—*read it*. If it is my crime to have loved, I have committed my crime openly and honestly, in the face of day, and without need to blush."

Madame Crerar made no reply to this singular avowal, followed by a no less singular question; for she appeared too intently engaged upon the perusal of the letter, to heed particularly the words which she heard. At length her hands dropped before her, and, with an expression of great sadness and pity, she observed,

"My poor Agatha! this is very cruel, very; and as blind and fanatical as it is cruel. But you must bear up with a stout heart, and strive to be rather thankful than grieve that your future life has escaped the clog and fetter of such a pitiable blockhead. You see by this, my dear, that a young man may spend his life at college and amongst books, and yet never learn the evident truth, that what is personally and morally wrong, cannot be religiously right. A position so evident to us more simple-minded, that we should as soon think of stealing in the name of honesty, or punishing the innocent under the guise of justice, as of associating things so contradictory to each other."

Agatha felt the force and truth of these remarks, but without deriving comfort from them. Her heart was in no condition to receive such opiates. It was too much

and suddenly crushed to admit of instantaneous relief from even the best of mental medicine: and mere truth and fact constitute an indifferent balm for the wounded and lacerated bosom. High spirited and morally courageous, she would not let the world see all that she inly suffered—at times she appeared even to play with the very subject and occasion of her sorrow as if purposely to show to those about her, that she was above the most unworthy treatment she had received, and of too high a nature to seek support from pity.

The place where she was, Woundhouse-lee, and all its beautiful scenery, became desolate and painful to her. Not even the comforts and elegancies of the hospitable house, whither she was invited, nor the delicate kindnesses of its worthy occupants, could palliate materially the effects of that poisoned arrow which had penetrated to her very soul. And eventually, at her own earnest wish, she was removed back to her father's house.

The infatuation which had seized Mr. Forrest was in no wise abated by any feelings of compunction or regret. And as the modern toleration of the religion he had professed had of late years stimulated the erection of a new monastery at not more than two miles distance from Woodhouselee, Forrest shortly afterwards joined the fraternity that inhabited it; and thus appeared, as it were, to place the black seal to that covenant of wrong which he had written against Agatha le Blac.

Revocation was now surely rendered impossible: the wild and unjust enthusiast had cast the world behind him, and, on the wings of superstition, steered his imagined flight for heaven.

But the Eternal Ruler of that heaven decreed otherwise; and saw that it was good to punish the evil-doer—the venomous destroyer of another's peace. And what punishment more just than that which, in those retreats of solitude and holiness befel him? Or what device of man, what human power could have punished him so bitterly as did outraged Nature for the wounds he had inflicted in the heart of one of her most innocent and beautiful children?

Hurried away by this fanaticism, Forrest had even conceived the possibility of a return of his passion, or a slackening of the current which had swept him into that habitation of oblivion, where he had vowed to remain until he should pass to another state of existence. But ere no long time had elapsed, return that passion did, with redoubled ardor; though now converted

into the exquisite pain that comes of sensibility without hope. The gloomy shadows of the monastery, which before had inspired—or at least helped to sustain—feelings of religious solemnity and holy calm, grew foreboding and dreadful. Remorse avoids silence and darkness, which, by favoring reflection, can but enhance its horrors. That once peaceful temple of the enthusiastic mind, now assumed the aspect and sullen dreariness of a dungeon. The services of religion became distasteful and like a mockery to him; he even felt it as a sin additional to continue in the forms and appearances after the spirit had so materially departed.

This wild internal conflict, confined wholly to its own fires, soon wrought so violent a change in the appearance of Father Forrest, that any persons less accustomed to witness the gradual alteration than were his religious brethren, would scarcely, if at all, have recognized him again. Upon their perceptions it fell not suddenly, though still with sufficient force to excite alarm. He, however, determined to keep secret the real cause of his decline, and yet not utter open falsehood, in answer to all inquiries made, and questions put to him; he replied only that he was sorely tempted of the Evil One, who perverted his thoughts, and endeavored to fill him with unholy fears. Religious horror ran through the community, when these words were uttered. Fasts, and mortifications and continual prayers were enjoined, and duly observed. But the share which Father Forrest himself took in these observances, only added to the weaknesses and sufferings of a tormented body to the already too weighty maladies of the heart and mind. His afflictions increased with the progress of the spiritual remedies resorted to for their amelioration; until Father Forrest discovered beyond a human doubt, that a speedy death alone remains for him within those walls. And what if he were to leave them?—to abjure his vow, and renounce his religion? What a return to the world of mere pleasure and sin would not that be!—and to what idle and pointless purpose! And yet, again, since he felt it spiritually impossible for him to continue in truth and faithfulness as he then was, and, therefore, in spirit that he was cast out; since he found that he had been misled by a delusive, false zeal instead of a faith that endureth all things, why make the matter any worse by dying a hypocrite, and as it were hiding the punishment for his former sin in a monastic grave? Were not the fires that now burned within him

almost the point of death, the plain voice of eternal justice, commanding him to depart from a place for which he was unfitted, and return to the world to make atonement to the living, for the miseries he had inflicted? If so, why should he attempt to close his ear against a voice that *will* be obeyed?

Such were a few of the thoughts and broken sentiments which poured like a flood, upon the mind of Father Forrest as he lay one evening alone, and sleepless, in his cell.

On the following day, Father Forrest was missing. Every search was made for him, to no effect. Nor could it be discovered how he had made his escape. Hence some of the more pious of the order secretly came to the conclusion that, that for some deadly and unexpiated sin, the demon, of whom he previously complained, must have been permitted finally to carry him off, body and soul.

CHAPTER THE XLIII.

MR. PHILIP GOLIGHTLY—A FRIEND IN NEED
—PLOTING, AND ITS REWARD.

AND whither did Father Forrest go?

Singular as it may appear, cases not unfrequently arise, amidst the complications of human affairs, in which a man prefers an ordinary friend, or common acquaintance, rather than individuals most nearly related to him, and whose ties are endeared at once by affection and by blood. Thus Father Forrest, instead of flying to the paternal roof as the place of refuge, and seeking his father's council in the present extremity, directed his footsteps through the darkness of night towards the residence of a former schoolfellow, Philip Golightly; but who now in consequence of the premature death of his father, was converted into a country squire, with a large estate, and horses and dogs sufficient to establish an island colony.

Mr. Golightly was a perfect specimen of that peculiar kind of genius and taste which amongst the annalists of "the turf," of hunting and racing, and fishing, and gunning, inevitably constitute an undoubted hero. Heroism of this as well as of many other kinds, however, can exist only with money. Hence, the question naturally arises, is the man or the money the true object of the "hero worship" of country

sportsmen, jockeys, trainers, and the various human dependents whose existences hang upon the prosperity of the stables? Certain it is, that Mr. Golightly was, when combined with his wealth, his horses, his hounds, a good fox, and a first-rate dinner, a hero of no contemptible water.

It was past midnight, and Mr. Golightly was still at the table carousing with a party of his field friends after a steeple-chase, when the strange apparition of Father Forrest's skeleton figure presented itself at the door of the mansion.

It so happened that in times of old a monastery had stood in a quiet wooded dell within the boundary of Mr. Golightly's estate, and an idle tradition existed amongst the people of the neighborhood, that occasionally, about midnight, might be seen the dim appearance of a monk traversing the wide fields or skulking about the dark corners of the family residence. In perfect ignorance of all this, Father Forrest knocked at the door pretty loudly. It was opened by a tall man-servant, a fellow whose nature appeared to have especially jointed and screwed together for the due performance of the motions of his office, but who no sooner caught sight of the horrid spectacle of a hood and gown, than he uttered a cry of terror, and ran away shouting, "Oh, the monk, the monk!" Fright spreads faster than flood, fire, or contagion; and, consequently, some half-dozen female voices in the kitchen soon joined that of the hero of the hall, and together produced such a loud and unexpected concert, that the sporting gentlemen in the dining-room jumped suddenly up from their seats. Mr. Golightly rushed out, and the first human object that met his sight was Father Forrest, who, sure of a welcome, had shut the door when the servant took to flight, and advanced in search of the master. Golightly fell into an attitude of momentary fear arising from the unexpected character of the visitor, and uttered a loud exclamation of—

"Who are you?"

"Your old-schoolfellow, Robert Forrest," said the monk, smiling grimly as he pushed off his cowl. "I want your protection, and have come to ask it."

"Robert Forrest! Ah, and sure enough it is! Why, man, what a spectacle have you made of yourself. You are all skin and bone, gown and grief. But how came you out? What has brought you here at this time of night?"

"You shall know all in good time," observed Forrest, meekly; "but at present, I most need rest and nourishment."

"To be sure!" Golightly exclaimed, "that

is the most sensible thing, I'll swear, you've said ever since you buried yourself in that —But I musn't say so, I suppose. Why, to tell the truth, you look more like a wolf on his hind legs, after a six month's frost, than a true Christian being. Ah! I see you've been fretting about Agatha le Blanc —pooh, pooh—why she was a *poor* girl, wasn't she? And if you did put her feelings about a little, you know all women are like that,—one can't have any thing to do with 'em without that. I never knew a gentleman make a trouble about such a thing in my life before."

So easily may the finest good-nature be smothered beneath the rubbish of fashion, and the polite atrocity of ignorance garnished with wealth.

"And if Agatha were *poor*," replied Forrest, in a gloomy, yet indignant tone; "her poverty in the world ought to have been, so far as I was concerned, the greatest protection of herself. Yet you gentlemen make poverty an excuse for your impudence, and the want of money a plea for your violations of propriety—Philip! And yet you would have me comfort myself with philosophy like that! I know better, my friend; and there is, to-night, at least one man beneath your roof, who looks on poverty and innocence as (if there *can* be any distinction) more sacred, than that wealth and innocence which would not suffer utter wreck, even if converted into wealth and vice. But I know you do not think as I do."

Golightly stood and mused, as though something had been said which he did not exactly comprehend; and yet the truth of which loomed certainly, though dimly, before his mental vision.

"We will not argue that matter now," at length he said, "I'm no hand at that sort of thing. Just leave it all till another time, and make yourself as comfortable as you can at present."

Forrest spoke no more upon the subject that night; and, notwithstanding the most pressing entreaties of his friend, refused again to join the blithesome company below; men whose heads and hearts were, as he thought, alike free from care, because their pockets were full, and their sympathies confined solely to themselves. He partook of Golightly's respectable supper, and shortly afterwards retired to rest. To rest, but not to sleep. Innumerable confused images flitted amidst the air of that imaginative world, whose scenes are thrown open to the busy brain when the eyelids are shut, and the soul holds unhappy antipathy with sleep. Horrible cowed heads, mingled

with visionary gleams of angel women, and frowning yet pitying saints, made up the multitudinous spectres that crowded close upon him, and seemed as though they would terrify and oppress him out of existence.

Thus passed the night with Fathor Forrest, the apostate. The morning's dawn seemed as though it would never come. But though so long in arriving, come it did at last. And to him most gladly. Other beings might hail it as a returning to living joy and gladness; but to him it was a mighty deliverance from spiritual horrors, too great to be long endured.

Forrest remained at Mr. Golightly's some considerable time. What changes of mind, what variations of sentiment, passed within him, and for what causes, during that period, it would be long to tell. And our story is not so much of him, as of the unfortunate, and yet perilled Agatha le Blanc.

Let the result suffice us, without inquiring whether he was led to evil by his friend Philip Golightly, or by his own evil passions, or by both in conjunction. That the latter was the fact, would appear most probable; however that be, no doubt exists but that a plot was formed, by means of which Agatha was to be forcibly carried off, and subsequently either frightened or persuaded into a marriage with him. A sudden conclusion this, from so long a beginning; and yet only another sad step towards a terrible finality.

The consummation was thus brought about.

After Agatha's partial recovery from the dreadful shock her sensitive and fine nature had sustained, an invitation, couched in the kindest terms, was transmitted to her father Saul's house, requesting her to pass a month or two at Woodhouselee; in the hope that the kindness of friendship, and the enjoyment of country life, would materially assist in the restoration of the health which she had lost in so deplorable a manner. Agatha accepted it, and fixed, in a letter to the Lady Lavinia, the particular day on which she would avail herself of the proffered hospitality.

That fact became known to Mr. Golightly, and through him to Robert Forrest. Together, they determined to make use of the opportunity that would probably be thus offered, to effect the object previously determined upon.

In those days, if people travelled at all, they travelled by common stage coaches after the now by-gone fashion—that is, people who could not keep a carriage of their own. And as Agatha le Blanc aspired to

no such dignity, she took the ordinary conveyance from London in that direction, and arrived about seven o'clock—the dusk of the evening—at the end of a narrow lane leading from the high-road to Woodhouselee, where she was “set down.” That lane was not three-quarters of a mile long, but it lay between high banks, primrose and violet-decked, and grandly overarched by stooping trees that now, in the almost leafless spring-time, formed a vast grotesque trellis-work over it like a roof. The coach whirled away, and Agatha stood still a few moments wondering what to do, for the servants who should have met her on that spot were not there. But, though alone, what danger could exist in that remote and innocent pastoral solitude? None. Why should it? Besides she was as much alone standing still as if she walked onwards, and probably she should meet the servants from Woodhouselee as she proceeded. So, with a too fearless, because most innocent heart, she proceeded along the earthen causeway, sighing now and then as the recollections of the past, and the memory of her faithless lover, grew fresher and more irresistible. It was in that very lane they had passed their happiest hours.

She stopped before a great overhanging willow, whose boughs seemed to clasp midnight beneath their arms.

“Yes,” she said mentally, “here it was that he last uttered those thoughts to me.”

“My love!” exclaimed at that instant a voice from out the darkness beneath the willow, “be mine for ever and ever!”

And immediately Agatha beheld standing before her, with outstretched arms, the figure of a man—a man in a monk’s gown and cowl!

Agatha shrieked and again and again, but the monk seized her round the waist with one arm, while with the hand of the other he endeavoured to stifle her cries.—But, combined with this, his object appeared to be to drag her within the impenetrable shadow of that fatal willow.—She resisted almost with more than a woman’s strength, and a fierce, unnatural struggle ensued. In the course of a few seconds the sounds of carriage wheels were heard approaching—a token of coming deliverance, which supplied the affrighted young woman with additional nerve and determination. At the same time, she heightened, if possible, her cries for help, and shrieks of affright. The carriage rolled rapidly up, stopped, and hastily a gentleman, who appeared to be travelling, jumped out. The monk forsook his hold of Agatha, and aided at once by

the darkness of the evening and of the dress he wore, rapidly vanished from sight and effected his escape.

Agatha lay insensible upon the road.—The gentleman hastily raised her in his arms, placed her in the coach, took his seat beside her, and ordered the coachman to drive at his utmost speed. The gentleman then drew a bottle from a pocket of the carriage and applied it to her lips.—Unconsciously, and by a purely natural effort, she swallowed some of its contents. She seemed to revive, but every thing appeared in confusion—her own thoughts as well as the things about her. She strove to thank her deliverer, and begged to know whither she was going.

“To the nearest house, madam,” he said, in a hollow voice, which made her tremble, for it seemed to her that at some time she had heard that voice, or some one like it before. But that must be a mere phantasy,—a result of her affrighted and disturbed imagination. Strangely enough, the gentleman made no inquiries, he seemed anxious not to speak more than possible. But Agatha again addressed him,—

“Take me to Woodhouselee!” she said; “I was going to Woodhouselee!”

“It is too far, madam,” replied the hollow voice, “in your present state. We are going in another direction. I knew not which way you were bound when I saved you from some villian, who yet will find the gallows. You could not tell me, and, therefore, I took you along with me, intending, if you thought proper, to leave you at the first respectable inn.”

“Oh! thank you, sir; thank you!”

“Be at rest, good lady! You are safe in this carriage. Calm yourself. Do not talk, let me beg of you. The inn is not far off.”

Poor Agatha knew little more. She was overpowered. She sank into a deep and lasting sleep. A sleep it must have been of many hours’ duration, many. For when she awoke again, it was broad daylight; and she was laying in an elegant bed, in a smartly furnished and ample room. Her first thoughts was, that she must be deranged, and incapable of taking correct cognizance of things; her second, that she certainly was not at Woodhouselee, for there she knew the whole house, and familiar things in almost every room.

What need to prolong this tale? Agatha was made the victim of the plot between her former lover and his reckless friend.

In order to throw her surely and securely into the hands of Robert Forrest, Phi-

lip Golightly had consented to act the monk in the former's dress; while the deliverer, the gentleman, was no other than Forrest himself.

Agatha recovered her senses again, only to feel more bitterly the extent of her ruin. She ordered herself to be conveyed directly (and in spite of the earnest advice of a physician who had been called in) to her father's house. There she kept her bed for months. But not many days elapsed after her arrival before Saul was made acquainted with every thing that had transpired. What effect such a story from such a mouth might have on such a man, may easily be imagined. No sooner had he become acquainted with it, than leaving his daughter in the care of her mother, he suddenly disappeared from his habitation. On the evening of the same day, a tall shallow, determined-looking man, mounted on an excellent steed, arrived at the public-house of the village of Woodhouselee. He ordered a room to be prepared for him, and said his stay would probably be of two or three days duration. He did not appear to have any particular business on hand, but made himself remarkably agreeable and familiar in his conversation with all. By this means he soon ascertained all he wished to know respecting Forrest and Golightly, with which the neighborhood happened to be acquainted. His next step was to ride to the house of Mr. Golightly, and with his own hand present a note addressed to Robert Forrest. It read as follows:—

"The conduct of Robert Forrest, in an affair which he will too well understand without explanation, has placed him utterly beneath the contempt of the meanest soul that crawls the earth. But if he has courage to vindicate his actions, he will not fail to appear accompanied by a friend, at the gate of Mr. Golightly's park, at sunrise to-morrow, where one will be prepared to meet him, who, though he knows not how to ruin innocence, knows how to avenge it when insulted.

"Any evasion will only involve Robert Forrest in probably worse consequences."

Saul did not wait for a reply, but rode back to the inn.

Forrest showed this unusual challenge to Golightly.

"No more than I anticipated Bob, not a bit. If you love out of order you must fight for it, though this rigmarole holds no conformity with the code of honor; why did not the fellow send his friend?—Never mind, meet him, that's my advice. It is clear from the note he sends, that he

is no gentleman; and equally clear, on the same authority, that you are none. So there at least you are equal. Depend upon it, Bob, he is some ignorant mongrel of a fellow that'll either beg your pardon for his insolence, or run away when he sees the muzzle of a pistol. Go out, my lad; and I'll stand second."

Accordingly at sunrise on the following day, Golightly and Forrest repaired to the appointed spot. Instead of some merchant's clerk or draper's assistant, as Mr. Golightly's fancy had pictured the night before, they beheld a man on a black horse, whose looks at once declared him no trifier and no trembler. The apostate monk shrunk from his demonical gaze. Saul dismounted and tied his horse to the palings.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "I am happy to see you and quite at your service. Which is the principal?"

"I am the second," said Golightly. "Have you no friend?"

"Many," answered the other, "but none here. I want none.—we can do just as well with one between us."

"No. We cannot fight so. I withdraw my friend until preliminaries are properly settled," said Golightly.

"Not so!" exclaimed Saul savagely. "If any one is under disadvantage, it is I. Please to select your ground, for I hate trifling, and shall not suffer *any* gentleman to leave the spot until satisfaction is given."

At this deliberate insult Golightly reddened with rage. "You shall answer to me for this, sir. Pray, who are you fellow?"

"That is exactly what I intended," replied Saul, sarcastically, "when the principal is disposed of I shall invite his supporter."

Philip measured the ground, but said nothing.

"These are my weapons," remarked Saul, as he handed Golightly two brace of pistols; "if you approve them, load, and proceed to business. If not, select your own; they will doubtless be satisfactory to me, for I am not difficult to please."

The squire examined them,—pronounced them excellent, but, for a private reason of his own, refused to use them, and selected from three brace which he had brought in a box.

Golightly placed the men, and gave the signal. Saul stood untouched, but Forrest fell,—speechless—dead.

"Now, sir," observed Saul, "remove your friend, and take his place."

Golightly was unnerved, as well he might

be, and would have adjourned the meeting. But his desperate antagonist very coolly informed him that time was precious when revenge stood waiting, and that he (Golightly) must either exchange shots or receive a sound chastisement. This decided the point. They stood to the mark, and Golightly received a ball in his leg. Saul was again unhurt.

The latter then shook hands with his fallen foe, wished him a speedy recovery, —bade him good morn'ing,—mounted his horse, and in the afternoon was again beneath his own roof in Bermondsey.

"I have not seen you these three days, father," said Agatha, languidly, as Saul entered the chamber of his daughter. "Where have you been; what have you been doing?"

"Killing a snake, child. The same serpent won't crush and wound again."

Agatha sighed, and wept. She knew at once what her father had done.

But the duel passed over, though not without great difficulty. Golightly persisted in stating that three had agreed to fight without seconds, in order that no other parties might be compromised. While Saul had so effectually disguised his appearance on the occasion, and so well contrived his going and return, that all attempts to trace the fighting stranger proved ineffectual, for Golightly gave only a false clue to the cause of the affair.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. HOLLIS OBTAINS AN INTERVIEW WITH AGATHA LE BLANC, AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITH HER FATHER—THE RESULTS.

SUCH was the unfortunate history of Agatha le Blanc, whom we found distractedly on her knee, after she had chanced to overhear the terrible discourse between her father and Mr. Thoroton relative to Mr. Hollis.

Hitherto she had aided her father, but now it was proposed to add to moral crime, to imposition, and sinful mystery, the deadliest crime of all—the unwashed stain of murder.

Agatha, well knew her father's determined resolution in carrying out any object that he might have in view, whether that object might be good or evil, to doubt for a moment the sincerity of his conversations

and agreements with Mr. Thoroton on the fatal night in question. Of that, if any proof were wanting beyond her general knowledge of him, she had fearful proof in the conduct he had pursued towards Forrest and Golightly so many years ago.

"In the eye of heaven," thought Agatha, his hands are yet red with the blood of his fellow man. For, however honor and indignant feelings may color crimes of this nature, Heaven—which recognises not the falsehood we call honor, and which warps not justice by passion—will never hold the slayer of man free from guilt. I must and will save my father from dyeing the red more scarlet, and the scarlet black. There are two souls and one human life to save—it is in my power, and apparently mine alone, as an instrument in higher hands, to save them; and by the divine blessing, saved they all shall be."

And with that thought and firm resolve, she rose from her aching knees and prepared herself for the task of justice and mercy.

The result has already been told in her mysterious visit to Mr. Gabriel Widge, and the consequences which flowed from it. But still Agatha was really unacquainted with the full extent to which the importance of her information had served the interests of Mr. Hollis, and up to the very time of Thoroton's attempted suicide, knew not but the design against Hollis might possibly at any fitting opportunity, be put in operation.

Having seen Mr. Hollis quit the melancholy habitation of the desperate Thoroton, we are now fully prepared to join him upon his arrival at the house of Saul le Blanc, whither, it will be recollected, he was bound.

His visit, be it also understood, was perfectly unexpected by any party he might chance to find at the latter place, having been arranged almost upon the instant between Mr. Sandhill and himself.

The young artist experienced some difficulty in penetrating, for the first time, the many tortuous lanes and alleys that surrounded, like the chambered outlets of a rabbit warren, the closed-in dwelling to which his footsteps were directed. Inquiries amongst the neighbors at length enabled him to ascertain the house precisely. When at the door he involuntarily hesitated before raising his hand to strike a curious and ponderous old knocker, made to resemble either a gothic angel, or a demon, the light not being sufficient to enable him to ascertain which.

Many must have felt as Mr. Hollis felt,

on standing for the first time before the door of a house within which he knew not what might be his reception—with what guests he should perchance meet—what unknown occurrences of moment might take place before he should again turn his back upon it. He stood momentarily and considered, as though doubtful what to do. Yet no such feeling existed in his bosom; it was only the effect of a certain indescribable awe which he felt on finding himself about to be introduced into the presence of so strange a character as Saul, and perhaps also of the high mysterious lady who had so devoutly watched over his destinies, and probably also held him to her bosom when a helpless infant.

In answer to his summons, the door was opened by a servant maid, of whom he demanded whether M. le Blanc was at home?

"I believe he is, sir, but will ask Mam'selle Agatha."

"Present this card," said Hollis.

The maid disappeared and in a few minute returned, stating that Miss le Blanc would receive any communication he might have to make on her father's account. Mr. Hollis's heart leaped like an affrighted thing and he felt that all his resolution would be required to enable him to address himself to the lady without apparent emotion of some description or other, best understood by her who alone was conscious of the cause of it.

Presently he found himself in a small but elegantly furnished room, warmed by a blazing fire, and upon a table, in the centre of which stood two wax lights that threw their beams with a peculiarly broad and artistical effect upon the fine tall figure of Agatha le Blanc. Not that youthful and sprightly Agatha, who so unhappily won the wild affections of an insane lover many years ago, but the serious and majestic woman, the thoughtful, yet the proud. With all her inward efforts to appear unconcerned, Mr. Hollis plainly saw a deep blush suffuse her features as her eyes momentarily alighted on his face, and then unconsciously wandered away, lost as it were amid the dream-like scenery of the past which that glance so vividly recalled.

"To you madam," remarked Hollis, "I believe my deepest thanks are due for information concerning my own safety."

"No thanks, Mr. Hollis, are due to me," said Agatha, interrupting him, or rather relieving him, for he hesitated to proceed; "I have, indeed, made at the last hour but the poorest restitution for a too long period of culpable secrecy,—perhaps, I had better at once say crime."

"Impossible, madam, permit me to say. Your generous nature undervalues your own goodness too much, and magnifies proceedings undoubtedly strictly just, into a distorted form of error which they cannot, and do not deserve."

"When you know as much as I do," replied Agatha, with a half melancholy smile; "and it shall not be long before you are made acquainted with all; then sir, I doubt not you will inevitably form a less flattering judgment. Every individual is too apt to admit only good on his own side, and purity in his own intentions. Self becomes a comparative perfection, and other selves a comparative imperfection. Were this thing otherwise, we should come nearer the truth, and discover that, taking all in all we generally do more evil in the world than good. Sir, I feel that repentance is more necessary than praise, and dread of our own errors better than the condemnation of the errors of others. But this talk is too idle on such an occasion; you expect others things from me, and now have a right to expect them. You have business with my father; but I felt that explanations and cautions were necessary before that meeting took place. It is very easy, Mr. Hollis, for a man to have enemies that he never made, and to have them in reality disguised as friends."

"Whatever other guilt may attach to me," observed Hollis, "I am at least innocent of having deserved evil at the hands of either of the two persons against whom you, madam, I feel confident, so mysteriously warned me."

"You fell into evil hands at the beginning," replied Agatha, "that is if you be the person whom certain parties supposed you to be."

"We have obtained many remarkable collateral proofs that such is the fact. Indeed, perhaps, all that is now required in addition can amply be supplied by yourself."

"Thank Heaven, it is so! you shall know all the Lady of Woodhouselee ought, had I been as true as I should have been, to have known long and many years ago, but I am not without blame and sin, and my father was deeply compromised in the same matter, so that I felt bound to protect him. I regret it, and feel bound to protect him still; at the same time that I expose to you his—what term shall I give it, in speaking of my father? He is my father still, sir; and, whatever he may do to others, he is a most affectionate and indulgent parent to me."

"Let me beg of you madam, not to dwell upon such painful and distressing reflections."

Every assurance that it lies in my power to give shall be most freely given, to shield your father from consequences in any shape injurious to himself, or painful to his daughter. I pledge myself as a man of honor, that he shall suffer nothing from any communication which it may be your pleasure to make."

"I thank you, sir, deeply and truly. It is a fearful tale for my lips to utter, but the time has come, and it must be told. Your assurance gives me courage, but yet I fear I shall fail in depicting truly the long series of atrocities, for these acts deserve no better name—which have been perpetrated and planned by Mr. and Mrs. Thoroton, and in which, unhappily, I must confess that father and myself have had a share. But do not misunderstand me at the outset. Our share has been that of accessories, of people conscious of the wrong, and guiltily keeping that wrong a secret, from worldly and interested motives. That is all, though that is surely a great deal too much. My own connivance has been solely to serve my father. I gave way, not without many efforts, many hours of sorrow, many tears; and even then, only when I found the utter impossibility of turning my father from his purpose—that of making money through the agency of Mr. Thoroton's fears."

Such were the prefatory remarks which Agatha made, to her full and complete discovery of all the circumstances concerning Mr. Hollis, as child and man.

She concluded thus:—

"So long then have I been faithful to an evil trust. But upon another proposition of murder from Mr. Thoroton, I could not and would not keep the secret longer. I resolved still to screen my father if I could, and your solemn promise that he shall escape unscathed, must form his shield; for religion, morality, and law, alike refuse to offer one. But, even had I failed to effect this, and let the results have been to any or all parties what they might, I should still have done the same. Sin must have its end some time; and the little virtue there is left in us, will also, at some time, assuredly assert its dominion, and prove that God has not made, even the worst of us, all evil. May this consideration, sir, strengthen your determination to regard all parties mercifully. But for Mr. Thoroton—"

"The mercy of Heaven alone," said Hollis, solemnly, "is now required for that desperate and most unhappy man. Madam, this very night my eyes are fresh from witnessing a scene of horror in his person, which even yet chills my blood as I behold it again in the too-strongly pictured imagination."

"More horrors!" exclaimed Agatha.

"What, sir, can it be you mean?"
 "He has anticipated the punishment of violated laws, and refused to await the visitation of an offended Deity. Madam, he has attempted self-destruction."

"To-night? And is it accomplished?"

"This very evening. But whether he is dead, I know not. He was yet alive, when carried to one of the hospitals."

"This will be dreadful news to my father. Though, in another sense, it might be looked upon as well. Such an act has, of course, finally settled intrigue and crime for the future. A dreadful retribution, however, and a terrifying end! Pray let us go to my father; tell him this in the first instance, and leave the rest to me. I will introduce you, for no one else must be by, or within our hearing."

And so saying, Agatha led Mr. Hollis into the same room in which we last beheld Saul plotting with Thoroton against that young man's life. Saul was seated by the fire, and, with the aid of a pair of spectacles, was perusing a folio manuscript-work upon astrology.

"Father, this is Mr. Hollis, the young gentleman who expected to paint your portrait. I have had some conversation with him, and he knows more than you anticipate."

"Then Mr. Thoroton may be expected, sir?" observed Saul.

"Mr. Thoroton has this night discharged a pistol at his own head," replied Hollis, "and is, probably now dying. He may be dead as I speak."

"Ha!" exclaimed Saul at once amazed and disconcerted. "Heaven's justice is done!"

"Thank Heaven, father!" cried Agatha, "that you admit its power! For, during too many years have transactions taken place beneath this roof, as though there were no Heaven—no hereafter—nay, not even any sin in a world which all else can feel is far too wicked."

"Agatha! Agatha!" exclaimed Saul; "what can possess you? Are you—"

"No," interrupted she, "I know the word. I have been insane, or have acted as though I were so. But now I am sensible, and too bitterly conscious of my past errors. To screen you from the first, and support your plans with Thoroton. Oh, never heed the presence of Mr. Hollis, for I have told him all that is passed, all I know, and nothing more remains for him to learn—your day in that matter is ended. I had sufficiently perilled my own soul already, without permitting the possibility

of such a dreadful termination as was discussed in this room not long ago."

"How came you to know it, daughter? I flattered myself you had been too well taught to listen to your father's guest."

"It was accidentally, or providentially, father," replied Agatha, proudly; "that I overheard that dreadful project proposed."

"But you did not believe it, daughter Agatha? You could not surely believe such ill of your father, as to suppose for a moment that he was in earnest in what he said? No; Mr. Hollis may credit me or not, as he pleases, but I can assure you, Agatha, that seeing Thoroton was grown at last so reckless that he would hesitate at nothing—no matter how dark the deed—to gain his object, I suffered him, by my seeming acquiescence, to go on, *only that he might finally convict himself beyond the possibility of denial*, and so insure his certain punishment. I admit this conduct is not remarkable for scrupulous honor, but no further personal interest existed with me in Thoroton's safety—he is a mere thrashed husk of corn—and I knew he merited detection. My firm and secret intention was, to permit him to go to the extent of a show of violence towards Mr. Hollis, in order that the fact might not be doubted; and then to assist in securing him. But if I have lived, Agatha, until you can think me really capable of becoming accessory to a deliberate murder—no less—I have, indeed, survived your mother much too long. But I was, in a manner, prepared to receive such a blow from some unexpected quarter. I have been looking into my own nativity, and find about this time I shall lie under heavy suspicions, almost affecting my life. Here is the accomplishment of fate!"

Probable as it is that all this was nothing more than an extempore invention of Saul's, for the purpose of giving a better color to his part in a plot which now he found blown to air, it yet materially answered the purpose (or *seemed* to answer it); and the more especially so, because Mr. Hollis had no desire to hold him more guilty than could be helped, or to seek for a moment for any further proof of it, than naturally was displayed upon the surface, and, therefore, could not be hidden. Mr. Hollis consequently appeared to give entire credit to Saul's interpretation; expressed his great satisfaction in hearing the statement, and then, turning to Agatha, he remarked:

"Your father, madam, it clearly appears, was undeserving of the harsh opinions which a misunderstanding, or misconception, has so unhappily induced you to entertain respecting him. But now your

heart will be reassured, and, I trust, your peace of mind become re-established."

There was more of heartfelt kindness in these observations, than literal sincerity. But the speaker well knew that, let the world say what it will, it does sometimes become the positive duty of a man to refrain from expressing his every literal thought, in order to preserve the amenities of life, and reconcile the suffering to themselves.

Agatha replied—if reply it could be called—only by tears; and having silently pressed Mr. Hollis's hand left the room.

He and Saul were alone.

"And so, sir," observed the latter, "my daughter told you every thing?"

"To the smallest particular."

"Very good, very; but hasty. I should have done the same thing myself, Mr. Hollis, when the infamy of Thoroton had grown fully ripe, but she has anticipated me. A more polished villain I never met with. I promised him failure from the beginning, for it was written. I, also, promised my self to inflict moral justice upon him for his criminality, and well has it been carried out: he is reduced to beggary. Young man! though you knew it not, you have been well avenged. Punish him no more; for, between me and his own hands, he must by this time have expiated his crimes. If you can prove your identity with the lady of Woodhouselee's child, *we* can prove the rest: that it did not die at the time alleged, and that the funeral which took place in the family vault was that of a beggar's babe, procured for the purpose, and which had no right to be there. I did, on one occasion, extort, in a moment of passion, from Mr. Thoroton, an admission to the effect that his wife abandoned the child in the foundations of an unfinished building, but that they were not guilty of its murder."

"Agatha did not tell me that," said Hollis, "but it is a grand point of evidence; for I can prove, M. le Blanc, that I was found in such a place, about that same time, close upon the neighborhood of Thoroton's then residence."

"Enough, enough, and more than enough!" cried Saul. Your case is proved, and nothing remains but to restore you to your mother, and to your possessions."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE GENERAL HOSPITAL.—MR. THOROTON IS VISITED BY SAUL, AND HOLDS STRANGE TALK WITH HIM.

WE are now in a public hospital. It is early in the morning, between seven and eight o'clock. We may suppose a room containing five iron bedsteads, which creak and scream harshly and painfully to the ears of the sick, as their diseased and restless occupants occasionally turn from side to side, in vain search of the ease which is banished from beneath that roof more than from any other description of building. Such of the patients as can spend a day upon their legs are already up, and either making their beds or awaiting to render any such assistance as their more helpless fellow sufferers may require. A bell rings below, and a general stir and bustling of feet immediately follows. It is the breakfast-bell, and the large trays of bread and butter, of tea and milk, are carried along the passages, disappearing in the several rooms as they pass. The bread is in large hunches, and the tea and milk, in tin cans. Beside each bed stands a small buffet, and on this the meal is placed. But the nurses and people who go about, instead of being silently shod, wear heavy boots and shoes, the sound of which is hideous and unbearable to Mr. Thoroton, who lies on one of those beds, only half sensible. And even the sense he has remaining flickers and flits like a departing flame, and only conveys impressions of pain, and sorrow, and fright. His hair is cut closely off, and his head and face are "strapped up" with adhesive plaster, so that between his wounds and the means employed to heal them, he makes a frightful and pitiable spectacle.

Such was the first stir of morning in the public hospital. But later in the day, towards noon, another repetition of the sound of busy feet was heard, and a whisper ran that "the doctors were come." Previously, however, to that period, Mr. Thoroton had been visited more frequently than he himself was conscious of, by the house-surgeon, as he was termed, a gentleman of the kindest manners, and one who had not forgotten the appearances of outward consideration which ought still to be observed towards Mr. Thoroton, notwithstanding his present position, and the sad event that had taken place. He took him kindly by the hand, and whenever he had occasion to address him, did so with the scrupulous delicacy and kind feeling which become a gentleman and a man of education, when com-

municating with one who, whatever his present condition, was yet not one of the common herd, whether, as regarded either his intellect, his sensibilities, or his education.

But when the "visiting surgeon," under whose care Thoroton was placed, arrived, at the period just alluded to, he found a woful difference for the worse in the two characters. Whether it was that Mr. Nobbie was really an ignorant man in every thing except his profession; that he was too naturally coarse in grain to receive the polish which finer natures take, or that he considered—as ignorance commonly does—that the act of which Thoroton had been guilty had rendered him a thing to be despised,—we cannot take upon ourselves to say; the fact, however, is certain, that after looking at the poor half-dying figure before him, he demanded (much more than asked) in a stern, unfeeling tone,—

"Well, my man, how do you find yourself?"

What little sense remained in Mr. Thoroton, rebelled passionately within his own bosom against this vulgar coarseness. Had such a title as that of "my man" been applied at any other time, Mr. Thoroton would have told Mr. Nobbie that he was an insolent fellow, and shown him his back. As it was, he only looked ineffectual indignation—mistaken by Nobbie for a symptom of his delirium,—and spoke not a word. Mr. Nobbie then made a few general inquiries of the house-surgeon, and took his departure just as though leaving the carcase of a dog.

Doubtless, Mr. Nobbie considered he was doing an essential service to all in the hospital whom he gratuitously attended. And so, indeed, would every body else have considered had he but recollected, and practised the simple precept, that, in rendering a service, it is quite as much the manner as the matter, which gives that service value, and renders it an object worthy of grateful recollection. It would appear, however, that Nobbie had never made any such reflection, or nurtured a single social virtue, beyond the virtues of the table, in the course of his life. But some men have the peculiar faculty of clothing even their benefits in the garb of insolence, and consequently of stifling the gratitude which they may consider due to them, even before it has had time to be born. Such men should also recollect, that their unpaid services in these establishments, are not altogether such a pure mass of charity, as the ignorant poor, who usually receive their aid, might be led to imagine.

In a professional point of view, they receive benefits as well as confer them, since practice and observation are of much more real importance than the mere theories of the schools.

Another source of annoyance to Mr. Thoroton was the numbers of practitioners who came to look at him. His was a peculiar case, and every body wanted to see it. But unhappily, in fact, his poor disturbed brain could receive only impressions of wretchedness from all and every thing that he dimly saw and heard. He dwelt in an imaginary world of horror alone. His very attendants became (as his delirium increased) converted into enemies, who were punishing and torturing him. He struggled against his medicines under the delusion that they were poisons, and intended to effect his murder. The room in which he lay no longer conveyed correct images to the eye, and he felt convinced that he was in another place, in a far country, and was travelling to seek another home. His former home was destroyed, he thought, and society had cast him out, so that no man would any more look him in the face. That was the reason why he was travelling to a foreign land, where his name should be changed, and the bitter past be buried, like a corpse unfit to be seen, in his own bosom.

Then he felt suddenly the burning conviction that he had betrayed his best friend for the love of gain. That friend was before him to charge him with it, not to reproach or punish, but only to show him what effect this treachery had produced upon its victim. "See what it has made me do," said the suffering vision, and immediately Mr. Thoroton beheld him face to face. Vainly did Thoroton strive to get away from this dreadful witness, it still followed him, it would hear no prayers of his to leave him, it said that, notwithstanding all this, it would remain his friend still. And that idea cut Mr. Thoroton more than all the rest.

It would be too painful to pursue these delirious horrors, which in one wild form or other lasted, with a succession of changing scenes, about five days. During that time the poor patient was given up as irrecoverable.

But at length, one night as two watches sat, one on each side his bed, and the dim light of a rush candle made all the objects in the room at once visible and obscure, Mr. Thoroton suddenly shrieked; his eyes were wide open and wild, and evidently appeared to see something which in reality was not there. He closed his eyes and

hid his face in the pillow. Then he cautiously opened them again and as they happened to fall upon the figure of one of his attendants, he asked,

"Are you gone?"

"Who do you mean, sir?"

"That old watchman in a grey coat, and a woman with a child, that peeped round from behind him? No they are there yet, there they are!"

"Do not look that way, sir, and then you will not see them."

Thoroton directed his vision towards another part of the room, and in a second or two added,—

"But there's another;—I see who he is. Now then I am determined to go home.—I won't stay, if you let such people as these come about me. I am not frightened at them, but I would rather not have them; they do no good, and only prevent me from going to sleep. I shall never sleep here again until they are gone."

"I can see nothing," said the man.

"No, you cannot see, because you will not see. You are in at the plot like all the rest of them. You are determined to frighten me to death, if you can, in order to get rid of me; and then to-morrow you will tell my wife that I died. Let me go, or else shut up your slides—for I know how you do it—there's plenty of mechanics can do that, and you fancy I know nothing about it. They do it on purpose. There's a number of people outside the roof, and when they see me look any where, they cast a horrid shadow before me. Look at that great dog there! and there's another; and there, just running under that bed, there's a thing neither beast nor fowl!—Take them away, tell them to stop it, for it is more than I can bear, being so ill. If I were well I should laugh, but I won't endure it; I can't!"

And then the unhappy man made a prodigious effort to spring out of bed, but he was held down by his attendants.

"You must be still, and go to sleep," said one; "we cannot allow you to get up."

"Then hinder them from sending these strange people. They mean to keep this tormenting up all night; but if I have done wrong, beat me, and let me go. I can bear your beating, if you will let me go, but I won't have your phantoms.—Besides, the sky, when I look up at it, is blurred with blood, and you say I have darkened heaven. But I have not. I never murdered a child. It is alive now, and along with its mother. There's a snake on the bed. Very well, I know it

is only another of your tricks; it is only a shadow. But I do not like your swarms of black flies, they make such a noise. Why does that man there?—(pointing to the occupant of an adjoining bed)—“make a word every time he breathes, and say, ‘Aye, aye, aye,’ as if he lamented what I had done? Every body insults me.”

“Drink this little drop,” observed an attendant; “it is brandy, white brandy, I think.”

“No, no brandy for me. I’ll take water, but nothing else.”

The attendant pretended to give him water, but it was a potion to procure sleep.—Thoroton drank it, and in half-an-hour sank amidst his ghosts and terrors into a slumber, such as it was, broken by visions as vivid as those that haunted him awake.

On the following day he was more sensible, and appeared to have some correct idea of the things about him. In short, to the surprise of every body, he finally recovered. But before he could be removed to his own residence, several of his friends were occasionally permitted to visit him. Amongst these might, one morning, have been seen his old fellow-scoundrel, Saul le Blanc. The room contained only these two, and, therefore, they spoke without restraint.

“I am sorry, Mr. Thoroton,” said Saul, “to see you in this plight; but glad to find you are recovering.”

“I had no desire to recover, only people will save you from death if they can, though they will not save you, when alive and well, from being driven to knock at his door, and ask for admission. They think it quite enough to drag you from his step,—to prevent your going in. And yet, the conduct of a man towards a man is always forcing the weakest to look on death as their best acquaintance.”

“That may be true,” replied Saul, “but society does not look upon it so. It is in this, as in another thing. Society and laws make many paupers, and then, having made them, consider that the Christian duty is sufficiently discharged by maintaining them at the ratio of so many human beasts.”

“Society is much mistaken,” replied Thoroton: “and sin and error sanctify sin and error all through. Take the whole nation, man by man; and each one, though secretly knows more of himself than of any other man, will yet talk as though other men were a plain book of evil to him, and himself the sole pure mystery.”

“You and I, at least,” retorted Saul, sarcastically, “are philosophers enough to

know precisely the contrary. We are remarkable exceptions. And yet it is singular enough that which you have said, that all the units should be so very good, and the aggregate so very indifferent; or, on the converse, that the units should possess so much of evil, and yet shine so brightly in the mass, as they persuade themselves they do.”

“Every fool and knave defends his folly and his knavery, as well as the same folly and knavery in others. It is necessary, to keep self and others in countenance.”

“Does any reason of that kind weigh with you in your justification of this most pitiable and absurd act of which you have been guilty?”

Thoroton’s wan and disfigured face colored deep for the space of a few moments, and then resumed again the natural hue of weakness and debility.

“Perhaps it may, though I am not aware of it. But this truth is evident, that without some fellow-feeling with others, we cannot enter into motives, or justly judge of actions; and he who possesses such feeling most is necessarily the clearest exponent we can have upon the subject. No man can judge of a broken heart but he who carries one in his bosom.”

“Still, I think,” replied Saul, “that such an act is the extreme—pardon me the word—the extreme of cowardice.”

“You think that such a man as I am is necessarily a coward?”

“I do not say so.”

“You implied as much.”

“Perhaps I might, if you choose to take it so.”

“Then, sir!” exclaimed Thoroton, in a raised and hollow voice, as he rose suddenly up in his bed, “as soon as I have been enabled to leave this pillow, it will remain your duty to test that cowardice!—I shall put you to the proof.”

“And I shall beg to decline—”

“You cannot, you cannot, you shall not!” hastily cried Thoroton, interrupting Saul: “besides you owe me another debt, which no power on earth shall hinder you from discharging. You have robbed me for years.”

“You are unfit to discuss these matters now, or otherwise I would talk. Good morning; but do not forget that your poverty has made you powerless,—that your intended victim, Hollis, will shortly be the Lord of Woodhouselee,—that I am safe, and all connexion between us is ended.—Unless, indeed, you should at some future period be in the same mind as now, and if so, I will endeavor to accommodate your

wishes. I had rather decline it, as I said before, but if you will, you must. Good morning, sir."

And Saul retired, cool and passionless, from the room.

Thoroton felt speechless with anger.—He thought that Saul must be his bad angel, leading him into sin, and plunging him at last into the pit of death. His fever returned, and with it his delirium also. He raved about treachery and murder, robbery and poverty, until from exhaustion his voice grew inaudible. It became apparent on the following day that he was rapidly sinking. Stimulants were applied, but ineffectually. Mrs. Thoroton was informed of this unexpected change, and hurrying to the place, arrived just in time to see her husband expire,—Saul's victim to the last!

CHAPTER XLVI.

SHOWS HOW MRS. THOROTON DETERMINED TO RE-ESTABLISH HERSELF IN THE GOOD OPINION OF HER SISTER, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

AND now she was a widow; stripped of the wealth she had once enjoyed, and without a single soul whom she could truly term *friend*—unless, indeed, that excellent sister whose confidence she had so abused, might yet be considered as such. And what hope now remained of that? None—less, indeed, than none, for the greater certainty seemed to be that she must, according to the common nature of humanity, become her hater and her enemy. The spirit of forgiveness sweeps over an almost boundless sphere, when the heart that it makes its home is poised aright, and vibrates—as the true heart should—between the mercy above us and the deep necessities below; but yet it could not be believed that the Lady Lavinia would any more be to the widowed Clarice as a sister or a friend. That were, indeed, to stretch the quality of forgiveness almost beyond human power; since to forgive is never to remember with regret or pain. And how could the Lady of Woodhouselee do that? Impossible!—For, whatever the will may be, there are circumstances which occasionally arise between one human creature and another so heinous in themselves, so "gross in nature," as to defy the teachings of reconciliation, even on the grounds of justice.

Between her sorrow over the dreadful events that had happened, and the bitter consciousness of her abandoned and hopeless position, Mrs. Thoroton had much ado for awhile to sustain that life which was become but a continuance of punishment, an unbroken chain of suffering, the prospective end of which was lost in that dreadful gloom from which the soul shrinks affrighted, and which peoples the wandering brain with images of horror only, and fear of the punishment eternal. Could she have had a comforter, a special pleader to varnish sin, take the weight from guilty actions, and mould falsehood into the outward form of truth, then might her condition have become more endurable. But she had none now her husband was gone, and vice without sanction, sin without society—with nothing like itself to keep it in countenance—is assuredly the truest type in this world of the fiery reality to come.

Notwithstanding this misery, which bore less of the character of repentance than of the fruit of disappointment and defeat, Mrs. Thoroton had not lost her cunning and hypocrisy. For when these moral weeds have once been nourished, though they turn the garden of the soul into a desert, and bring its owner to despair, yet they defy even then all efforts to eradicate them. Like the roots that have clasped a stone, they can only be disengaged by the destruction of the thing about which they have grown. And as one evil almost inevitably precipitates another, and Mrs. Thoroton considered her case otherwise totally hopeless, she at length resolved to regain, if possible, the lost esteem of her sister by similar means (though differently employed), to those which she had used in the first instance, and by which her present necessity had mainly been brought about. It was a reckless and desperate stake, but no other appeared now remaining for her to make with any chance of success.

Accordingly, not twenty-four hours had elapsed after the death of her husband, before Mrs. Thoroton appeared at the town residence of her sister, for the first time these many months; so many, that they marked a serious separation, and spoke of a division too wide, perhaps, even to be wholly obliterated. She was coldly conducted by one of the servants into an apartment, where she sat many minutes—to her each one seeming like an hour—before any one came to visit her. She felt herself like an unwelcome and neglected stranger, under a roof where her presence was not wanted; not as one sister ought to feel under another's roof. This increased the

bitterness of her grief, and caused her to sob convulsively aloud even while alone.

At length the door was thrown open by a servant, and Lady Lavinia walked majestically forward. Her countenance, though yet beautiful, was sad, and careworn, and stern. She looked the picture of Justice, when firmly, yet reluctantly, about to use her keenest sword.

"Oh, my dearest sister!" shrieked, more than spoke, Mrs. Thoroton, as she rose in an attitude as though she would have fallen upon that lady's neck. But the latter shrunk from her touch, as from that of something polluted, and exclaimed, in a chilling tone of rebuke,

"Clarice! I am indeed astonished to see you here. At this time, under these circumstances, how could it have been supposed that you would ever ask, or venture, nay, dare to look me in the face again? Rather should I have expected that you would for ever have avoided one whom you had so deeply, so irretrievably injured; and have retired to some remote and unknown place, where the last remnant of your life might be spent in profitable reflection and undisturbed repentance, over your most base dissimulation, and, to me, unpardonable crimes."

"You will forgive me, sister, you will, when you know the truth—it was not my fault—it was not, indeed! My husband did all the wrong himself, and, by the most horrible threats, compelled me to be silent."

"Nay," replied Lavinia, "attribute it not all to your husband; he is gone, and cannot answer for himself; but such an impeachment of the dead only aggravates your offences: the wrong cannot all have been with him and none with you—"

"It was—it was indeed!"

"Better not assert it, Clarice. You will gain no credit with your fellow-creatures; and how Heaven may judge such blindness, I leave to your own conscience to seal."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Thoroton, in an affected agony, "that Heaven would judge me now, openly before you, and then you would know my innocence!"

"Horrible!—most dreadful! I cannot endure this frightful falsehood," said Lavinia; "If you have lost all respect for yourself in this world, at least, Clarice, at least have some consideration, some pity for your immortal soul. Knowing, beyond all doubt, what I now do—for the woman Agatha has discovered every thing—these protestations are frightful and terrible to me. Do not persist in them, or they may

call down some fierce judgment which you do not perhaps believe in nor expect."

"I have no fear," replied Clarice. "I am innocent of all that is attributed to me—I am, as truly as I speak."

The Lady of Woodhouselee felt that her conviction of her sister's criminality was beginning to be shaken, for she could not wholly believe in the existence of a deliberate solemn liar—a falsifier in the name of the Great Eternal, who knoweth all things, and the secrets of all hearts.

"Can you, Clarice," said Lavinia, in a voice that, for the first time during this interview, betrayed some tender emotion, "can you truly look me in the face—remember the past for many years—recall your own actions respecting my blessed child, who is now miraculously restored to me, and call sincerely on God to witness that you have been to me as a sister ought to have been, and that you are free of guilt in this matter? Take heed of this, I do not ask you to do this—Heaven forbid I should become my sister's tempter!—but, tell me, can you, if you think upon the peril of your soul, do such a solemn act of denial?"

"And if I do," replied Mrs. Thoroton, "am I to be believed?"

"We must not lose and abandon all faith in one another," responded Lavinia, "and solemn human testimony ought to be received. I cannot refuse to believe you, at least, far less guilty than I have been led to believe."

"Bring me a Bible," said Clarice, with deeper dissimulation than one-half mankind could suppose possible amongst the other, "and let me not only call God to witness the truth of what I say, but let me say it with His holy word in my hands, that my sister may hear and believe."

"Nay, there is no need for that," replied Lavinia; "the absence of the Word cannot weaken the ear of God himself."

"I had rather," answered Clarice, as she rose to take up from an adjoining table a small volume, the form and emblazonry of which at once declared its sacred character. "This is the blessed book—my present witness to testify to the Witness Unseen, that what I shall utter to you, dear sister, is of the truth. And here, as I hold this holy volume in my hand: now, as I speak before Him who shall be my judge to all eternity at the last day, I testify and swear that I have never had a willing hand in any mischief towards either my beloved sister Lavinia, or her son who was her first and last born. But I vow that my husband—now in his grave, was the sole instigator—"

Mrs. Thoroton felt a little choking in the throat, and her eyes wandered from the face of her sister, but she recovered that, and continued,—

"The sole instigator and perpetrator of all the evil with which wicked tongues have charged me individually. And if I have uttered falsehood, like the wife of Ananias, may the visitation of Heaven—"

"Hush! peace!" exclaimed Lavinia, as the tears burst from her eyes, "say no more; do not such a crime as will call for judgment here!"

But lo! her reproof and check were needless. Mrs. Thoroton could not speak again! Her eyes assumed a strange demoniacal expression; her face became convulsed, and drawn on one side into frightful distortion; her whole body on the same side was paralysed, and in terror and agony, as well as because her limbs had become useless, she fell like a dead weight to the floor.

Horried beyond the possession of reason at this direct vision of the eternal judgments, Lady Lavinia shrieked piercingly and wildly, and sank insensible upon the couch which she had occupied. Almost instantly the door flew open and servants entered, followed by Mr. Sandhill, Mr. Hollis, and Miss Sylverthorne, who the Lady of Woodhouselee had so recently left assembled in another room, while she retired to have this fearful interview with her sister.

Mrs. Thoroton was sensible though helpless. The use of one side was gone, and her articulation so nearly destroyed, that scarcely more than one description of sound remained in her power to make, and even that one seemed to render her visitation more awful, for whenever she emitted it, it took harshly the sound of the word *liar*—and "liar, liar, liar," served to signify all and every thing that she struggled to make heard.

Along with all this horror, her features never resumed their natural form and position. Altogether, the miserable, wretched, and lost woman presented a spectacle which turned momentarily the blood of every beholder cold.

She was raised from the ground and carried to bed, while the nearest physician received a summons to attend upon her.—Meanwhile, the attentions of Miss Sylverthorne restored Lady Lavinia to her consciousness, when she cried, in the deepest agony,—

"My poor sister! my unhappy sister!—What has befallen her? Is she dead?—But I cannot think of it,—nor of her being

dead! Oh, no!—it would be too dreadful!"

"She is very ill, my dear friend," said the sweet, calm voice of Miss Sylverthorne: "very ill, but not near death. Mr. Sandhill has sent for a physician, who will be here immediately. But what shall we say to him when he comes? We are ignorant of the cause of all this; and he will certainly ask questions."

"Say my sister has had a paralytic seizure, and the fright made me faint; but say no more. He must know the cause himself, or find it out; for there was something, my dear, which preceded it, that I can never tell to a living soul. So ask me no questions—no questions."

When the physician arrived, and beheld the shocking figure of Mrs. Thoroton, he pronounced her case hopeless as respected a cure; and added, that a second attack would certainly terminate her sufferings.—When such might occur was uncertain, but the event itself was inevitable.

In vain, on the recovery of the Lady of Woodhouselee, did Mr. Sandhill and Mr. Hollis (who had sometime previously been received as her son; in form) endeavor to get at the bottom of this mysterious occurrence. True to her sister in this pitiable situation, and conscious no good could ever come of an explanation of the fearful prelude to this tragic incident, Lavinia abstained from all disclosures connected with it; nor were the literal facts of the case ever known until the period of her own death some years afterwards, when upon her dying pillow, she revealed them to her happily-restored son.

To return to Mrs. Thoroton, however, and briefly relate the sequel of her sad history.

Having so far recovered the first effects of the shock as to be safely capable of removal, she sufficiently explained by her signs, her desire to be taken to her own house on the Hampstead-road. The request was instantly complied with; for all under the roof which then sheltered her, felt as though some preternatural being was about the place while she remained, and gladly hear of the hour of her departure. But she wished to see her sister again before she went; a sad request, which that lady knew not how either to grant or to deny.—Lavinia dreaded the very idea of beholding her; even once again. And yet she wept over the seeming cruelty of refusing that, perhaps last request, of a wretched and condemned being, who no longer could excite in her bosom any severer feelings than those of pity. She felt that it would be a

terrible trial, but duty and humanity appeared to require it at her hands, and she resolved to undergo it at the risk of any suffering.

The Lady of Woodhouselee advanced alone to the room where her sister lay; and on entering it, placed her left hand over her eyes, and extended the other towards the bed. She saw not the being before her, but she heard that unnatural piercing sound, and trembled as with an ague.

"Clarice!" said she, half chokingly, "you can understand me?"

Again that fearful voice was heard, uncontrollably articulating the no less fearful one word—if word it could be called—that now alone remained upon her tongue of a whole language.

"I have come to tell you I forgive you all, from my very heart's core. My grief is beyond expression, and I pray Heaven to help you in this frightful extremity. Take my hand, but pardon me if I dare not look at you."

Mrs. Thoroton extended her left arm, which was the only one of which the use remained; but instead of taking the hand her sister offered, she violently snatched hold of that which shaded her eyes, and tearing it down, caused Lavinia to look at her involuntarily. The effect of this unexpected movement rivetted Lavinia for a moment or two to the spot. And the two sisters gazed at each other as though by the power of fascination—one of fear and terror, the other of gratitude too overwhelming to satiate itself. In the next minute the Lady of Woodhouselee violently extricated herself from the grasp that had held her, and with strength given her for the occasion, rushed out of the chamber, but then would have fallen at the door had not Miss Sylverthorne caught her in her arms.

Mrs. Thoroton was taken home in a coach, and from that time the two sisters never saw each other more. It was their last interview in fact, but an enduring one in memory to her who most deserved to have forgotten it.

Notwithstanding this final separation, the good Lady Lavinia took especial care that her unworthy sister wanted for no attentions that this world could bestow, to ameliorate her wretched condition, and reconcile her to herself. And much did she stand in need of such a supporter; for having once seen her own countenance in the glass, she was seized with horror and remorse, that she confined herself to two rooms, one within the other, during the re-

mainder of her weary life. She had one woman as a constant and sole attendant; but forbade any of the other servants even to look at her, even if they should meet her by accident, on pain of instant dismissal. So that the singular social phenomenon occurred in that unhappy house of servants remaining for years without ever seeing their mistress from the beginning to the end of their stay.

Thus then lived Mrs. Thoroton, banished from her family, frightful to her fellow-creatures, obnoxious to herself, and a living mystery of sin upon the tongue of common fame.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONCLUDES THE STORY OF HOLLIS—SHOWS THE FINAL SUCCESS OF SAUL—AND WINDS UP OUR HISTORY WITH AN ACCOUNT OF LAUNCELOT'S LAST WHIMSICAL ADVENTURE.

THE meeting which we have alluded to as having already taken place between the Lady Lavinia and her son, has been so arranged and brought about by the skilful judgment and keen perception of Mr. Sandhill, as to produce the least possible excitement on either side. By gradual communications and gentle allusions, and well-timed delays, he prepared the minds of both to meet, with comparative calmness that otherwise too affecting moment, when the patroness of the poor artist should be lost in the mother, and the grateful recipient of that generous patronage be exalted to the blessings and dignity of such a mother's son.

Notwithstanding all this preparatory care and precaution, it proved a strange admixture of joy and sorrow, that meeting. Joy at the unexpected brightness of the present and the future, and the lingering regret over the miseries and sufferings of the past. For though we may distinctly admit the literal truth of that philosophical remark which is ever on the lips of the common comforters of society, "that it is no use to sorrow over what is past and irremediable," yet nature regards something else besides mere utility; and in the comprehensiveness of her feelings and her benevolence sighs over pains gone by, even while she admits that sighing is no remedy. But sorrow over the past is sympathy with the past; and they who feel it, can have but

little sympathy either with the present or future. Such philosophy is calculated to beget indifference only; and such indifference is opposed to the first and finest principles of our nature. It is useless to regret the past! Why, true, so far as the past is concerned, but untrue in reference to the now-time and time to come. Repentance itself is sorrow for the past; but at the same time it is that dawn of the present which promises noon-day glory coming.

And so the Lady Lavinia and her son spent many serious hours together, hours that heard many heart-heavings, and saw many tears. But they were sighs and tears which like quiet winds and rain drops upon a waste of flowers, only made the sweetness of the charm more perfect.

Innumerable were the plans and projects marked out by the good lady to promote the happiness of the restored child; it seemed as though his past endurances were only to be atoned for by continual attentions, and countless efforts to render every object of his life agreeable. He could express no wish that was denied, or scarcely form one that in some degree had not been anticipated.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sandhill had taken necessary steps to effect those legal arrangements which were needful to secure Mr. Hollis in his new position, and restore him to the possession of the family name. So that, in due time, he was invested with that of his diseased father; and as Sir Stephen Woodhouselee took possession of the whole heritable estates. He did not, however, abandon the profession he had chosen, and for which nature had so especially designed him; it was a part of his very life, and as necessary to a happy existence, as food for the support of that existence itself. He labored as assiduously as ever, though with far greater pleasure, being free from the frightful presence of that dire spectre of want, which too often terrifies the poor man of genius from the pursuit of the highest branches of his art, and bends the angel of intellect to the ordinary drudgery of a common man, or else denies him daily bread. They are wretched and mischievous philosophers who contend, that genius best flourishes under necessitous and difficult circumstances; and may be held upon a par, in the intellectual world, with the gardener, who, in the physical, should plant his most delicate and beautiful flowers in sand, and his tenderest trees upon a rock. Yet this miserable, drivelling falsehood has become remarkably prevalent of late, and been industriously propagated by many—especially by certain Scotch writers—who

ought to have known better. The reason, however, is evident. This oppression and crushing of genius, under the flimsy pretext of extracting more of its sweets, serves at once to cover a multitude of “sins of omission,” which the multitude perpetrate against genius, and also to save in its full and plump integrity that visible idol of popular worship, *the pocket*. Because genius will produce under misfortune and misery, *therefore*, misfortune and misery form the best compost in which to plant it. Just as, by parity of reasoning, a wild songster of the forest will sing his notes in captivity, therefore, the cage, the sand, and the prisoner’s allowance of food and water, constitute the best means of making him sing. Admirable reasoning, and well worthy this selfish, avaricious age! As though peace of mind, and freedom from the paltriest of anxieties—those which regard merely how he shall subsist from week to week,—did not leave both heart and intellect more free to disport in the imaginative happiness, than the continual gnawing fear of coming to want, and the crushing mental consciousness of being unappreciated by one’s fellow-creatures!

But of this, enough. Sir Stephen Woodhouselee sufficiently proved the utter fallacy of this pitiable fustian, when, in his own person, he experienced the delight of being placed beyond worldly care. His pencils became dipped in light, rather than in gloom, and a new and brighter spirit appeared to control the creations of his inventive fancy. The stimulus which dithards, and they alone, seem to require,—that of bodily requirements and love of money,—was needless to him. He knew there was pleasure enough in creating beauty for beauty’s sake alone; just as there is in truth-telling, solely for the love of truth. But the mob cannot yet understand this; it sees only one mainspring of human actions, and that the worst—love of money. Wealth! wealth! wealth! A sad plague; but one, the progress of which the rod of Moses himself could not arrest.

It will excite no surprise in the reader when he is informed that, precisely in character with what might be supposed from the preceding observations, the elevation of Sir Stephen to wealth and dignity had the natural effect of improving his pictures very materially in the eyes of the multitude of gazers; and many were included in that category, whom we should little have expected to see there. There was a consequence, an ideal importance, now attached to his works, which before they wanted. The beauties of Sir Stephen far outshone

the beauties of Mr. Hollis; because, in the one case, there was a comparatively great man to please, and in the other, only a little and insignificant man, about whom every body was indifferent. But such is man, the world over;—consistent, discerning, reasoning man!

The fool of his own devices,—the worshiper of riches and titles of his own making!

And now, having traced our hero thus far, but one little matter remains to be related of him, in order to complete—as is commonly supposed—his happiness.

Although our painters had not, in that day, dreamed of the establishment of art-unions as a means of promoting their comforts, Sir Stephen Woodhouselee resolved to establish a heart-union of his own, upon a somewhat different principle. He determined to get married. And as Miss Christabel Sylverthorne had long previously anticipated that such an event would, in all human probability, some day come to pass,—since Sir Stephen had, upon various solemn occasions, hinted as much within her timid hearing,—she was not greatly surprised on being lovingly requested by him, to grant him the favor of allowing herself to be conducted to the altar of the old church near the Hall, there to become Lady Woodhouselee. And grant it she did, of course; for she would have done the same, had he still remained the poor artist that he was, when first their acquaintance began. So the old Hall underwent a thorough renovation and repair;—not a tasteless patching with modern stuff upon an antique fabric; but rather a sort of revivification of glories long since faded; and in due season the village bells announced to the country round, that a baronet and his lady, of the right old family of the Woodhouselees, were come again to reign in all the gentleness of charity and peace amongst them.

Truly enough it has been said that man proposes, but Heaven disposes. Nine months had not elapsed after the event just recorded, when the same village-bell again was heard over the surrounding country, as before; but this time it swung gloomily and at intervals,—tolling for sorrow over one of the twain whom so lately it had welcomed with the sharp, quick sounds of rejoicing. The new-made bride was dead, and about to be carried into the bosom of the earth. She had been carried off by a rapid fever; and her husband was even now lying in a state of uncertainty as to life or

death, from the same cause. But the scythe of destruction was whetted; and Death, like a strong mower, when the harvest is ripe, left not the field after one stroke alone. Seven days afterwards, and the new heir of Woodhouselee was no more. Nor was even this all. The now doubly widowed mother, the Lady Lavinia, soon began to sink under these dreadful visitations; and before the year of marriage was out, she, too, laid down her burden at the feet of Time.

And after that, there were many claims upon the property, and many heirs and pretended heirs, and much passionate litigation. Nobody read aright the plain lesson written up in the premature fate of the last possessor. All were for this world, and could see this world alone. So, in the end, and to satisfy many equal, though remote, claims, the estate was offered for sale.

On the day of the auction, a tall, gaunt, fallow-looking man, accompanied by a lady richly dressed, drove into the village, and attracted considerable observation. Some old people fancied they had seen him before, and especially the grandmother at the inn, but could not call to mind when and on what occasion. However he made inquiries about the estate of Woodhouselee, employed an agent to go over it with him, and estimate its value; and when the sale took place he was amongst the crowd, and bid for it. His chief opponent was old Squire Forrest, who had made up his mind to become the purchaser, even if at a higher sum than its estimated value. But the tall stranger outbid him every time. Old Mr. Forrest began to exhibit considerable petulance of manner at the opposition he experienced, when Saul, for he it was, turned towards him with a bitter and sarcastic expression of countenance, and remarked,

“If you had desired the estate for your son, Robert, Mr. Forrest, I might not have opposed you. But as it is, I guess he is contented with less ground.”

The old man was cut to the quick by this ferocious allusion, but returned no answer; he did not even know who he was that so addressed him.

Finally, the estate was knocked down to Saul le Blanc. When he heard the words which made it his, he smiled grimly as he turned to his daughter, Agatha, and whispered,

“There! It is done. Did I not tell you years ago, that if Woodhouselee did not become mine in the end, there was no truth in my faith?”

Agatha looked into her father's face, and turned pale; all eyes saw that, but knew not the cause, for no ear save her own had caught that mysterious reminiscence.

Had not the character of Le Blanc been that of stern unchangeableness, and his heart as impeneetrable as flint, he could not have enjoyed the final object of his ambition even when attained, considering the means he had employed, and the various wretched associations connected with its history. But he was a man upon whom remorse never had power, and who was never known to express regret over any action of his life. His nerve was as of iron, and his determination and self-possession as unshaken to the last as a decree of fate.

Materially otherwise, however, was it with his daughter Agatha. All the acts of deepest charity, the penances and devotions of her remaining life, appeared inadequate to her restoration to what the world considers happiness. Her time was wholly employed in the practice and pursuit of good; and yet she possessed so little the power of a self-excuser that to the last hour of her life she felt only error and sin within herself, and built her hope for the future solely upon faith and mercy.

It now only remains to be recorded respecting the sage Gabriel Widge and his clever son Launcelot, that the former discovered, when too late, the folly of attempting to manufacture ability through the agency of mere education; while the latter concluded his glorious career exactly where that of his natural as well as professional contrast, Mr. Hollis, began. In other words, Launcelot eventually declared that the arts were so wretchedly encouraged in England as to offer no inducement to clever fellows like himself to pursue them as a means of subsistence; and, therefore, he resolved to paint no more portraits, though he did not form that strong resolution until his sitters had almost altogether forsaken him.

Before things had come to this crisis, however, he had tried, without adequate success, that last refuge for the mediocre geniuses in art—itinerant portrait painting, at so much, in such a style; the said style being of a peculiar composite order, made up of wiry outlines, blue coats, and brick-dust-colored flesh. In the tasteful city of Bath he might have enjoyed a chance of succeeding had not the place happened, as it did, to be pre-occupied by a fellow of exactly his own stamp, an unsuccessful student of the Academy, named Wickens, who monopolised the practise of the city in

painting *signs* for hanging upon the insides instead of the outsides of the houses of its inhabitants. Of this fact, however, Mr. Widge (who calculated upon Bath as a sure spot for practice), was altogether ignorant, until some time after he had announced, through the medium of the newspapers, the important circumstance of his own arrival upon professional duties. Then it was that Wickens, a sour, bad-tempered, and miserable jealous bit of humanity, sent to Mr. Widge, whom he had the assurance to consider as a rival, an ill-written, misspelled, and otherwise ungrammatical note, in which he informed Launcelot that he himself (the writer) had the distinguished honor of enjoying the patronage of the city, and consequently it would only be a waste of time and loss of money on the part of Mr. Widge to attempt to do any thing in, as the note expressed it, "a region which Mr. Wickens considers his own particular sphere."

"Why, the impudent dog," thought Launcy, "talks as though Bath were his own kennel, and no other had a right to enter into it. He deserves a kicking, and he shall have one. This piece of insolence is unexampled."

So, on the following morning, Launcelot, armed with a common schoolmaster's cane by way of walking-stick, and highly primed with the explosive powder of professional indignation, sought out Wickens's lodgings. And yet, as we have proved on a former occasion, Mr. Launcelot was an errant coward at bottom, though amply clothed outside with furious bluster and superficial fierceness. In those respects, however, he was, as far as possible, outdone by his unsuspecting antagonist, Wickens, than whom, in reality, a more pitiable coward never sneaked before his fellow-man, if, indeed, any man could honestly deserve to be considered the "fellow" of such a deplorable poltroon. The latter, however, whose vanity never allowed him to see his own blunders, no sooner beheld the swaggering figure of Mr. Widge at his door, than he took for granted that the gentleman had of course come to consult about a portrait; and therefore, without allowing time for explanation, launched out in a strain of the most fulsome and disgusting flattery, upon the subject of Mr. Widge's fine head, and beautiful hair for a picture. This nauseous torrent Mr. Launcelot put a stop to, by demanding of the self-sufficient dauber, whether a fresh artist had not recently arrived in Bath, who—begging Mr. Wickens's pardon—was generally admitted to be much superior to Mr. Wickens himself.

"Superior to me, sir!" exclaimed the last-named disciple of the brush; "impossible—preposterous, sir. Only see his pictures—"

"I have seen them," said Launcelot.

"Then, sir, you must be satisfied that he is a miserable hand."

"Is he?" exclaimed Launce, wrathfully.

"A miserable hand you think him, do you?"

"Well, sir, I rather thought so, sir," responded Wickens, somewhat timidly; for he did not half like his customer's manner, and began to feel much terror from his own fears.

"Oh, you rather thought so! very well; and what do you rather think now, you miserable, slanderous rascal; now you know that I am that same artist?—my name is WIDGE. And you have had the brazen folly to send me this heap of impudence and ignorance."

And at the same moment Wickens found his own letter to Launcy skimmed violently into his face, and beheld a stout arm uplifted with a cane at the end of it, ready to descend upon his shoulders. Luckily for the poor culprit, the door of his room opened back into, or rather across, a corner, so as to form, when put to the wall, a triangular retreat, like a spontaneous corner cupboard. Wickens knew of this, having tried it before, and instantly seizing the door-handle in his hand, hopped with amazing agility behind it, and drawing it closely up after him, had disappeared no less dexterously than Zamiel, in "Der Freischutz," vanished through the stage-trap. Widge stood astonished at the moment, and strove to pull the door back, but Wickens's dreadful alarm supplied him so much strength, to act rather on the protective than the defensive, that he really was as fast and secure as if locked up in a chest. And as he began also to sing out lustily for assistance, and Widge dreaded the idea of being caught in the fact of committing an assault, the latter rapidly dropped down stairs, and streamed away along the streets before his footsteps could be pursued.

Meanwhile, Wickens heard his antagonist depart, and cautiously ventured to peep, and then to come out from his hiding-place.

Finding the coast clear, his fury now knew no bounds, he stamped and swore, knocked down a bottle of turpentine, burst a bladder of paint and vowed nothing less than annihilation against Launcelot Widge, but hearing feet upon the stairs, and seeing in the looking-glass that he looked alarmingly white, he hastily touched up his cheeks with a little vermilion in order to prove that he was not frightened, and scarcely finished the operation when his landlord entered to know what was the matter.

"What matter, indeed!" said Wickens, "you may well ask what's the matter. I have had a desperate battle, that's all the matter. Did you not hear a man cry out?"

"I heard your voice calling for help," observed Bobberly, the landlord.

"Oh, no!—pooh, pooh—you are mistaken. It was the other man—a fellow—that new artist as he calls himself—came here, and quarrelled with me—insulted me infamously—and we fought of course. He's broke that bottle and smashed the bladder in the struggle; but you may depend upon it, Mr. Bobberly, he won't come here again in a hurry. My face feels as red as fire with nothing but the exertion."

"It is uncommon red," remarked Bobberly, "and yet, Mr. Wickens, you seem to be all of a shake; but that's owing to the exertion as well, I suppose?"

"It is," replied Wickens, "it has made me quite nervous. But I've thrashed my man in style, I can assure you, and so far that is satisfactory."

And thus did this heroic portrait-painter pocket the insult he had suffered, in order to prevent any further exposure of his cowardice and falsehood; while Launcelot, who felt, when his passion was abated, that he ran some risk of having either a magistrate's warrant issued against him or of the commencement of an action for assault and battery, packed up his goods in all haste, and that same night took coach to London.

Finally, he converted himself into an ornamental house-painter and decorator, and, having entered into partnership with his old friend Stretcher, carried on a profitable and useful business to the end of his days.

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